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# HE LAUGHED IN FLEET STREET

*[Complete and Unabridged]*

*by*  
BERNARD FALK

V. R. NARL

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## ORIGINAL FRONTISPIECE

### ORDEAL WITHOUT TEARS

A MANCHESTER boy, eager to put his wits to the best use, comes up to London, and working on newspapers until he is fifty years of age, learns in the hardest of schools some of life's devious ways.

Happily, because God has given him a sense of humour, he perceives, as he goes about, that at the bottom of most human experience lies a rich vein of comedy from which the troubled soul can draw comfort, sustenance and a measure of healing. The same smile, naturally born, that cloaks reverses, will provide, so experience teaches him, the finest armour against the shrewdest strokes of Fate.

The chapter ended and the reckoning called, he sits snugly with his memories, warmed by them as by a brightly burning fire. As he passes and repasses through his mind their recaptured flame a feeling of gladness pervades his spirit, for he knows he has endured the long ordeal without a heritage of bitterness and regret to mar his remaining years. But, being human, he does not repress the contempt in his heart for mean little men in his life who repay kindness with hate.

The fortunate escape is his sense of humour's triumph. Humbly he thanks God for this merciful dispensation, and under the title, *He Laughed in Fleet Street*, the epitome of his attitude to the vicissitudes of a newspaper existence, sets down his adventures in a book which, if it do no more, should show whether his idea of comedy is shared by other people.

When all is done, human life is, at the greatest and the best, but like a froward child, that must be played with and humoured a little to keep it quiet till it falls asleep, and then the care is over.

—SIR WILLIAM TEMPLE.

## ORIGINAL PREFACE

### LOOKING BACKWARD

**W**HILE at fifty a man's life should begin to present a true perspective, the main lines unobscured by transient detail, to attempt to assess it in terms of happiness and prosperity must, at such a stage, be all too sanguine a proposition. At the best a verdict could only be partial, and, assuming the average duration of existence, quite open to reversal. Besides, the difficulty of reconciling the different meanings and values attached to happiness and prosperity would make me hesitate long before committing myself to a definite judgment on anything so problematical as an incomplete life.

But, in default of a more ambitious estimate, at least I have the right to review the years I have lived, allowing the sure and discriminating eye of middle age to trace the various stages by which I have travelled to my present goal.

At the recollection of the outstanding incident that has helped to fashion my career, the dead years have, for a brief second, renewed their youth and an old forgotten thrill or throb has tugged once more at my heart-strings :

They are not long, the days of wine and roses :  
Out of a misty dream  
Our path emerges for a while, then closes  
Within a dream.

I refused when I was young to take life too tragically, finding always in the most dismal situation some humorous relief ; hence for a book of the remembered happenings, a light pencil would seem most appropriate.

While writing this book I have had moments of careless rapture, when I could enter into the feelings of the thirsty reporter of my adolescence, who, having attended the wedding of a Bishop, had lain himself down on a doorstep by his office and gone fast to sleep. His report was still to be written, but when they drew away the copy-pad that formed his pillow they saw, emblazoned on the topmost page, the simple, eloquent words :

“ This has been a glorious day for all.”

There have been moments when the spell cast by fond memories having passed, I sensed a yearning for the old excitements, and I would ask myself whether my present peace of mind had not been too dearly bought in loss of the rush and turmoil, the fever and



nervous tension which gave my Fleet Street existence so gratifying an impression of completeness.

In retirement the days have nothing like the interest or appetite, attached to an active working career, and, too often to be comfortable, one feels out of line with the main procession. There is a surprising, almost uncanny stillness about one's activities, as though a jazz band that had for many years played outside one's door had suddenly gone on strike. In the unaccustomed and unexpected silence some of the soft undertones of life, no longer blurred in the hurly-burly, are heard clearly and distinctly as by a quickened and more sensitive ear; yet what pleasure should come from being attuned to these more subtle and exquisite refinements is spoilt by a craving, which can become a positive ache, for the old din whose clamour, sad to say, is second nature. At such moments the unguarded senses act as in rebellion, and their mute protest against being starved of their usual food presages much mental discomfort in the future. Always there hovers about the brain the disturbing thought that, to be happy, a journalist must toil on to the end.

Older men had warned me that to wake up with no accustomed routine to break the monotonous prospect, no hope of familiar noises and voices to afford a welcome diversion, would gnaw at contentment more than any actual business worries and anxieties. I did not believe them, and though the first nine months of unfettered leisure have warred shrewdly on my settled habits, I still see no reason to change my opinion. To a person of strong will the process of adjustment, however slow, cannot be other than certain. On a less exciting plane of existence than that which Fleet Street offers, a safe and agreeable harbourage for my restless spirit should not be hard to seek. A realist is not necessarily a pessimist. We who are fifty have not wholly lost our licence for adventure. In the realms of the mind alone what voyages remain to be undertaken!

Apart from an introductory chapter this book of mine will be found almost entirely devoted to journalistic experience. And, rightly so, for whatever of interest worthy of record has happened to me has been in the pursuit of my profession. Attached to a leading newspaper one passes a large part of one's time near the centre of affairs, and in the shadow of great occasions. Inevitably the brain becomes thronged with a multitude of significant and revealing impressions, so that when our turn comes to speak only the dullest among us could fail to be good company. Beyond the desire to be entertaining for an hour or two my ambition does not range.

Never in my long innings have I wanted for the emotional ardours inseparable from my calling. How I wish I had the art to convey to the sympathetic reader some adequate suggestion of the thrilling effects of the old years still echoing in my memory !

Into these pages I have not hesitated to crowd legend and lore gathered in Withy Grove and Fleet Street. By allowing me to pillage their own anecdotal hoards, willing friends have placed me immeasurably in their debt, and they are entitled to a share of any appreciation which this book may win. A round dozen stories, perhaps more, deserving of commemoration have been gleaned by me over a modest cup of tea or coffee. In a more perfect creation I should not have been a staunch teetotaler ; certainly I had been much freer with my money ; then, appropriately, champagne would have been the loosening agency.

Many have asserted that nothing is more desolating than to stir the embers of one's lost youth. I have not found the operation painful. On the contrary, it has been throughout a pleasurable and engrossing experience, with regrets kept well below the surface. Now I feel in the mood to answer the young journalist, who in my last year in Fleet Street, out of sheer curiosity and with no churlish desire to be unkind, asked what recompense maturity brought me. How should sedate middle-age respond to inquisitive youth whose tender years, by contrast, seem to carry a mocking message ? I agreed to prepare him a reply. Having sat with my memories and taken stock of my fifty years, I am ready, at last, with the desired *apologia*. I would say to him, as in a pleading way I would say to the merciful reader, that compared with my earlier years I know more, my judgment is saner and better balanced, my mind fuller of impressions of the finer things of life, seen, heard and experienced.

I would say that I feel it worth while being fifty to have seen Irving as Louis XI and Tree as Malvolio ; to have heard Caruso sob in *Pagliacci* and Madame Patti in sweetest voice sing " Home, Sweet Home " ; to have snatched delight from Ellen Terry's " Portia " and surrendered to the mother-pity of Duse in Ibsen's *Ghosts*.

And some part of the reward of being fifty, I would add, was to have gazed on the Countess of Warwick and Lily Langtry, when both were in the hey-day of their beauty ; to have listened to Rosebery's silvery tongue, Joseph Chamberlain's crusading thunder and Marshall Hall's vehement eloquence, and, in the same Courts of Assize where one would see the famous Counsel for the Defence, to have followed the hissing voice of Charles Mathews, actor under his barrister's wig, bringing home murder ;

not least of all, to have stood on the Embankment and watched the Kaiser, restless and arrogant, ride through the ranks of his uncle's loyal lieges, scaling, as he fancied then, the heights of glory, no thought in his head of the fall that Time was arranging.

The list is chosen at random. It could be extended indefinitely. But if I have not already satisfied my young friend, out of charity he must bear with me, for a journalist should not boast. I must needs think of what befell an impudent colleague. Tempted to enlarge on the sights he had witnessed, and the famous people he had met, he was abruptly pulled up by a blunt friend. Whereupon the following devastating passage-at-arms ensued :

" Have you ever had delirium tremens ? "

" No, of course not. Why do you ask ? "

" If you haven't, you have seen *nothing*."

Not consciously would I open my defences to a similar rebuke.

In its original form this preface was much longer, and, if I may be allowed the conceit, of a more delicate texture, embroidered with apt newspaper wisdom, carefully preserved for the occasion. Presumably it was of too delicate birth to survive, for between my home near Westminster Cathedral and Fleet Street, carried under my arm in a bundle of papers of no particular value, it suddenly vanished.<sup>1</sup> Vain my search, high and low ; always the missing manuscript was fated to elude me. Reluctantly, at long last, I came to the conclusion that never again should I hold communion with those elegant leaves. Gone for ever were my precious mental inventions, eternally perished like the lost verses of Sappho. Some unfriendly gutter in the West End had sucked them into oblivion.

Carlyle rewrote manuscripts that went amiss—wrote a better version. I have neither the patience of Carlyle nor his improving genius. I did not attempt, or feel encouraged, to model the preface on the old lines. Something shorter must do ; something that ran more easily out of my brain.

If I have a reason for mentioning the matter it is to be fore-armed against the censorious critic. Lest the imperfections of a first book be unduly stressed, I would wish in advance to proffer this excuse : the best of my handiwork was contained in the pages which went astray.

<sup>1</sup> A similar misfortune befell the manuscript of Lord Strathcarron (Sir Ian Macpherson, K.C., M.P.) which contained the first part of his *Reminiscences*.

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION  
*to the*  
POPULAR EDITION

THE publishers have honoured me by inaugurating the *Bookshelf Library* with the re-issue of my first book, *He Laughed in Fleet Street*. This, when published four years ago, met with a most flattering reception at the hands of both Press and Public. As the book still continues in demand I have been encouraged to revise the text in the most thorough manner possible, and, wherever necessary, bring it up-to-date, a task, I may add, which has proved to be of no mean proportions.

Nothing material has been left out or added, but in several places pronouncements have been slightly modified to meet my more mature views, though, as regards *essentials*, what has been said has been left entirely untouched.

The price of 3s. 6d., at which the book is now being published, should allow a much larger reading public to add a copy to their bookshelves.

I have always felt that people can be interested in the doings of newspapermen, provided the matter be made palatable enough for them, and does not wholly consist of a stodgy disquisition on the ideals of journalism, as to which everybody in the profession is agreed, without necessarily being able to define them to his neighbour's satisfaction.

The average reader wants to be as much amused by a book on Fleet Street as he is by the newspapers which Fleet Street produces. That has always been my view, and I have striven to act up to it.

Publishers used to say that the public would not read books about journalists. What they should have said was that the public will not look at a book ostensibly about Fleet Street, in which, while writing it, the author has carefully suppressed all his journalistic skill and succeeded only in being dull. So convinced am I of the truth of this dictum, that I have in preparation a second volume of journalistic memories to be entitled *Five Years Dead*, the period which has elapsed since my retirement from Fleet Street. And, if I live long enough, I shall issue a third and yet a fourth volume on the same topic, for the matter is endless. Even as I write this brief introduction, I am conscious

of the efforts being made by the younger race of journalists to guarantee me new sources of supply.

The genial J. B. Morton (*Beachcomber*) would have us believe that Fleet Street is rapidly becoming devoid of characters. That is not my opinion. The pale, unpretentious youth of to-day who attracts so little attention is potentially "the character" of to-morrow. Almost overnight he can be depended upon to develop those whimsicalities which make so many newspapermen attractive studies for a patient biographer such as myself. In this belief and hope, and always provided I am not stopped by Act of Parliament, I promise myself much congenial employment for the next ten years at least.

# HE LAUGHED IN FLEET STREET

## CHAPTER I

### AN ECCENTRIC FATHER

**A**NATOLE FRANCE would often complain, "My father was not a great man," which, even if true, had been better left unsaid. Made of sterner stuff my own parent gave me no chance to under-rate him. "What brains you have, come from me," he emphatically asserted. That ended the discussion. I knew more than to argue with one, who in such matters was entitled to the last word, and zealously pressed his rights. On a wet or a fine day, he could talk the hind leg of a donkey off. To be precise, my father had the "gift of the gab." In saying so I hope I shall not be thought disrespectful. Poor man! he has been gone these several years, and ever he had an anxious fear of me and my works.

In his make-up, I am bound to confess, there was more than a sprinkling of eccentricity. He might have walked straight out of the pages of Dickens and linked arms with Mr. Micawber. When our poverty was complicated by debt my father showed himself a dexterous writ-evader. If unsuspectingly opening the door, he was challenged by one of these unlovable minions of the law, he relied on his ready wit to save him. Greeting him with a polite, "One moment, please," he would call out to my mother, "Somebody wants Mr. Falk," and before the puzzled writ-server had tumbled to the device was well out of danger.

If resourcefulness be an inherited trait, then I owe what *nous* I have to him. I should like to think to that extent I am under an obligation to my father, since he had little else to pass on to me.

As a small boy I remember seeing strange men seated in the kitchen; they were laughing and joking and puffing away vigorously at foul clay pipes, what time our maid-of-all-work, precariously paid, brewed them great draughts of the best 1s. 4d. tea. The explanation that they were *bum-bailiffs* come to seize the furniture struck me as decidedly comical. I was too young then to have much sense, and decidedly too young to appreciate that



drama, not comedy, was the note of this *macabre séance*. For us to have reached this woeful pass we must, indeed, have been sorely beset by hardship. Yet never were our straits so desperate but that my indomitable parent found a way out. At the eleventh hour he would manage to "raise the wind" and pay off the unwelcome interlopers.

These melancholy memories abided with me and stamped their *moral* on my soul. I was never tempted to be as improvident as my father; nay it was to avoid a repetition in my own life of his chequered career that I disciplined myself to be thrifty, or, at any rate, to live well within my income. Apart from his inability either to make, or save, money he always struck me as shrewd, but the aspect of his character which most interested me and kindled my affection was his eccentricity, frequently extending to absentmindedness. As I am accused of being eccentric myself, I suppose it must be a case of "a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind."

Just as that great man, Edward Fitzgerald, saw no reason why he should not sit before the fire wearing his top hat, so my father recognised no occasion when his head should be uncovered.

I have known him, clothed in a night-shirt, don his tall hat to take in a parcel from the seven-o'clock postman, and in the early hours of the morning I have met him, similarly arrayed, busily engaged in "finding winners," his head buried in a small racing sheet called, if I remember rightly, the *Sporting World, Shilling Special*. He could not have found many winners, for while I was a boy our visible wealth underwent no change for the better.

My father disliked football intensely, describing it as "a vulgar game for ragamuffins." Whenever I was caught playing I was sure of a good hiding. For the most part he despaired of me, though I cannot imagine I was much different from other lads of my upbringing. When I was ten years of age he persuaded himself that the devil had hold of me. As nothing would shake him in this opinion, he proceeded to pack a bundle of clothes for my immediate needs, placed three shillings in my pocket, and with an emotional shake of the hand bade me seek my fortune. Three shillings in those days seemed quite a lot of money to one who was rarely given more than an odd penny to spend; so I was not unduly perturbed over being kicked out.

I remember strolling leisurely through Manchester's attractively dressed shops in Market Street, having a cup of coffee and a Welsh rarebit at a vegetarian café (sixpence in all) and taking various rides on the tramway cars that ran in the direction of Openshaw, one of

the poorer suburbs. With my back to the car, even though it were travelling at full speed, I could step off with the ease that one alights from the 1937 escalator, and on this particular day, which required that I should be in serious mood, it amused me to practise an accomplishment envied by my less nimble schoolmates.

In the evening, having exhausted 1s. 9d. of my three shillings' endowment, without being further advanced towards fortune or independence, I prudently drew nearer home, and, luckily, found my father who was out searching for me. His relief on discovering me was tempered by the mortifying knowledge that I had brought back only a fraction of my original capital; on the other hand he was cheered by the thought that the ordeal and the fright must have purged some of the dross from my soul. Withal it became more and more evident that in my relations with my father a sinister fate pursued me. I was always in trouble, mostly over clothes, for the reason that they quickly wore out. Alas!, the suits with which I was supplied were not of a material to stand much use, even if one were never so careful. To mention the subject of clothes to my father was, in his harassed state, invariably to involve me in a sound drubbing, which salutary dose he never failed to repeat at the tailor's, to the accompaniment of a long, heartbroken dissertation on my evil ways. I grew to dread being refitted. As never more than ten shillings were paid for my suits, it would have been a miracle had the shoddy held together longer than six weeks, the last day of which was zero-hour for me. Towards the end of the fifth week, with increasing anguish and dismay I would behold the knees of my trousers becoming conspicuously threadbare; furthermore there would be sinister indications that where I sat down had grown perilously thin. I knew what my father would say, that I wore out my pants merely to spite him.

The shopkeepers, wise in their generation, openly sympathised with my parent; in any case they had no remedy against a torrential flow of words which left all breathless. Meanwhile imagine me doing my best to avoid cuffs synchronising with the most melodramatic parts of his exposition!

However, I would not have it thought that my then impecunious father was wanting in kindness. When he was not dusting my breeches, for real or imaginary sins, he was spoiling me because of real or imaginary virtues. On balance I fancy the score must have been even. He had a patriarchal objection to eating alone, and of the tasty suppers my mother prepared for him there was always a helping for me. Sometimes, out of a desire to please

him, I ate what was put before me, though I had already been amply replenished.

As a small boy, whenever I acquired a penny, which was seldom, I invested in the contents of confectionery boxes known as "lucky dips." At a farthing a dip a whole penny gave you an extended choice. My preference ran to Spanish juice braids, twelve inches long, and to a brightly coloured lollypop with the all-important distinction of durability. I remember a toffee-man who, oblivious of the Lottery Act, salted his halfpenny packets with a proportion of free tickets. Draw a packet with one of these tickets, and you were entitled to another packet free.

As the result of eating sweets I developed a toothache. My mother gave me a shilling to have an offending molar extracted. I went to a chemist who drew teeth. He shut the door of his shop, hid the forceps in the sleeve of his coat, muttered, "Open your mouth, sonny, it won't hurt," gave a vicious twist and, hey presto!—a great gleaming white tooth lay on the floor. Picking it up to add to my collection—your own extracted teeth, like sharks' teeth, were supposed to be luck-bringers—I looked for signs of decay, but could find none, and, with a sharpness peculiar to the city poor, I quickly turned to the chemist and said, "Eh, mister, you've pulled the wrong one out." Examining my mouth afresh, he agreed I was right. It was the next tooth that should be ejected. "Well, mister, I've got no more money," I remarked warningly. "Oh, that will be all right," was his reassuring answer. On the strength of that promise I opened my mouth again, and out came a second tooth. Being a free extraction it seemed to hurt much more than the first. With two washed teeth in a piece of cotton-wool I rushed home to my mother, to pour into her amused ear the flattering confidence that I had had two teeth drawn for a shilling, *a good one and a bad one*.

As school-money my parents provided me each Monday with threepence, which, with conscious rectitude, I handed in on arrival. Boys who fell below my standard of probity and applied the money to sweets and broken biscuits were punished both at school and at home, and it was arguable that the stolen fruits of enjoyment were not at all commensurate with the penalties.

About this time one of the extraordinary myths which arise in every generation to bamboozle honest citizens broke loose in Manchester—at least among schoolboys. It was said that for every bag containing ten thousand cherry stones, required for the manufacture of doll's eyes, Messrs. —, the big drapers, would pay a bright new sovereign. Result: every boy became a

collector of cherry stones. Too late it was discovered that the whole thing was a grotesque hoax. We grown-ups have little cause to sneer at the credulous schoolboys of the eighties and nineties, remembering the solemn assertion heard, night after night during the War, that thousands of bearded Russian soldiers were passing through Croydon station. If we in our enlightened age could be so easily fooled, why should we be hard on the simple schoolboys of forty years ago ?

A staunch favourite at my first school was a boy whose father ran a greengrocer's shop. Each day, for our delectation, he brought along a stock of scraped carrots to be distributed under the cover of the desks. No Neddy ate so many carrots as the recipients of this unwholesome bounty, at which even our young stomachs sometimes revolted.

We had a martinet of a teacher whose bark was generally worse than his bite. He frightened me to such an extent that, whenever I had to answer questions *viva voce*, I lost the entire power of speech, and was caned for not knowing my lessons. Finally, that I might be acquitted of undeserved blame, I plucked up sufficient courage to tell him the truth. Thenceforth, as a special privilege, I was allowed to write down the answers. We dedicated to this teacher the following rhyme, which at the present remove of time I take to be a corruption of an old English jingle :

Sankey Doodle is a very fat man ;  
Tries to teach you all he can,  
Reading, writing, 'rithmetic,  
But never forgets to use the stick.

The most promising among us was the talented artist, Henry Ospovat, unhappily not destined to reap the rich reward of his blossoming genius, for at the early age of thirty-one, with honours beginning to fall upon him thick and fast, he was cut off. I remember that after school hours he would be given portraits to copy,—part of an art apprenticeship which was to be more thoroughly developed when he came under the tutelage of Walter Crane. Ospovat's most famous work is usually considered his illustrations to Matthew Arnold's poems and Shakespeare's songs, but he is, perhaps, better known for his remarkable caricatures, among others, of Caruso, Harry Tate, Little Tich and Marie Lloyd. In some respects he was a finer artist than Max Beerbohm, though he never enjoyed the other's supreme wit and literary accomplishment. But what chance did fate give him ?

The happy days I spent at Manchester Grammar School have a permanent niche of their own in the fondest part of my memory.

I was the holder of a scholarship entitling me to free tuition, and I recollect the hours of agony I spent until the letter-box with the news of my success could be opened, and my agreeable suspicions confirmed. Through the little glass window of the letter-box, which it was my father's habit to keep locked, I could trace certain letters of my name. As, normally, nobody ever wrote to me, I guessed I was being told the result of the scholarship examination. Unfortunately, my father did not return home until late, and those endless hours of suspense left me in an unhealthy fever. So much, I knew, depended on the accuracy of my surmise. Were I wrong, whence should come the opportunity to improve my education? In default of winning a scholarship, what means existed for sending me to a superior school? Heaven be blessed that these questions were not to arise!

I was an assiduous reader, devouring every scrap of newsprint, every book or journal, on which I could lay hands. I made friends of the local librarians and, noting my taste for good literature, they advised me to join their ranks. What frightened me off was the pay, which I thought ridiculously small. After school hours, with a book propped up in front of me, I would demolish a large plate of bread and butter; more if the bread were new. No need, then, for *hors d'œuvre* to give me a zest for food. The odd bits of information, picked up in the course of my miscellaneous reading, won the praise of my grammar school masters, who found that in history I could outstrip all the other boys in the class, though in everything else, I am sorry to say, I was far from being a prodigy.

When I had been gone from school nearly thirty-four years the receiver, Owen W. Cox, sent me a charming letter saying that he still remembered me. Obviously mine is a face that is not easily forgotten, though the reason should not make me vain. The Highmaster was Dr. King, who later went to Bedford. That I managed to avoid unpleasant interviews with him was part of the luck of the game, not excessive virtue.

Boys with comfortably-off parents took the shilling lunch at the school; I, with only sixpence to spend, went foraging in small cafés, or, in moments of folly, fell to the lures of the Italian ice-cream shop opposite; then, as a consequence, remained hungry and empty until I reached home. To see other boys adding ice-cream to a substantial lunch, was to experience the start of those revolutionary sentiments out of which the genuine Bolshevik is evolved.

Near the school, a cultured old gentleman, who had come down in the world, drew a meagre livelihood from a tiny second-hand

book-store. He was far from being a good business man, but in his generous frame there dwelt something superior—a vibrant and tolerant soul above barter and the wiles of the market-place. For 2s. 6d. a week, wheedled out of my parents, he improved my Latin and Greek, and with a flock of entertaining and useful knowledge, dispensed in the most attractive of brogues, and interlarded with anecdotes, witticisms, folk-sayings, expletives and anathemas, generally rounded off my education. He liked a “drop of the crathur,” and I have no doubt that a nip of whisky gave exuberance to his tutorial performance. His point of view was decidedly original. Once, when lingering on the wonders of creation, I mentioned the miracle of the earth’s circuit of the sun. This was his answer, “You think it wonderful that the earth should go round the sun every twenty-four hours. For my part I should think it just as wonderful if the earth remained quite still.”

If ever I thought of going to the 'Varsity, my father nipped the idea in the bud. He said that it was high time I began to earn a living. So I cast in my lot with an industrial firm paying me 8s. a week. They set me to addressing envelopes. At the end of the second day I told the clerk, who was my superior, that, unless I were given better work I should quit. My mutinous conduct being reported to the head of the firm, he angrily asked whether I expected to be made managing-director straight away. I replied that I had no such foolish notions in my head, but that I wanted to reach the top quicker than envelope-addressing would get me there. I was “fired,” and the firm expressed their unstinted opinion of me in a letter to my parents which caused them great pain. However, I was soon in another job, this time at an iron foundry. I had to check the work-people as they entered and left. I did the checking for one whole day, and was then, myself, checked out for good. My father shook his head on learning I had forsaken my second job, but his face brightened up a few days later when he found that I had landed a third, the result of answering an advertisement in a Manchester paper for a beginner to journalism. My clear handwriting—how it has deteriorated since then!—and my grammar school qualification had given me pre-eminence over other applicants. In this modest fashion, in my sixteenth year, began an association with newspapers that was to last until I had turned fifty and grey.

Apart from my handwriting, I could fairly boast of the following qualifications :

1. The ability to express my thoughts in commercial English.

2. An understanding of competitions ; I had won a penknife in a Football Picture Contest promoted by the *Comic Home Journal*.
3. Plenty of nerve, sometimes vulgarly termed "cheek."
4. An acquaintance with hundreds of "best books."
5. The capacity and willingness to live on very little ; most necessary in view of the salary, which was to be 5s. a week.

That I could write connectedly was due to practice with my father's letters. I turned his long-winded epistles into models of abbreviated pungency, and though he needed a great deal of persuasion to believe that sense and verbosity were not necessarily interchangeable terms, in the end he allowed me to have my own way. Here, in the duel between obstinate father and pertinacious son, youth triumphed. He gave up drafting his letters altogether. He told me what he wanted to say and I did the rest.

The paper that introduced me to journalism was the *Urmston and Flixton Telegraph*, published weekly at Flixton, which is a pleasant Manchester suburb, then in process of development. The Editor was the same Anthony Thomas Spalding whose golf articles have, for years, been the delight of readers of *The Star*. Of my qualifications, Spalding was the soonest convinced of No. 3—cheek ! With only 5s. at stake I did not trouble overmuch to stand on ceremony. While he was out practising his golf, I wrote, and had set up, a short story with a Russian background, entitled "The Woman with the White Hair." Though not so good as Chekoff's best, it pleased the proprietor, who agreed to print it. When Spalding was acquainted with the masterpiece, his praise was more directed to my "nerve" than to my imaginative muse. However, he did not aggressively interfere, and there being no evidence that the circulation suffered from the printing of the story, we did not come to blows. With commendable promptitude I informed my people of this literary success, but as the letter included a request for further funds, their joy did not overflow reasonable bounds.

Not yet having learnt to live on fame alone, I tendered a bill for original contributions to the cashier, and was paid the princely amount of 5s. The story occupied just two columns.

That extra 5s. was not to be despised. Unable to go home because of distance and expense, I lived in lodgings, subsisting on my salary, plus an allowance of 2s. 6d. and a parcel of cooked meats from my parents. I lodged in Flixton, at a little corner grocery shop kept by two charming, good-hearted spinsters ; week-ends I went home to re-provision. For the five-day Flixton

week I paid 2s. 6d. for bed—sometimes shared with a male relative of the landladies—and 2s. for breakfast of tea and bread and butter. Extras, such as eggs and sardines, etc., were paid for as ordered, which was not often. With total resources 7s. 6d. a week, varied by 3d. won or lost nightly at cards, I had to budget for myself with Gladstonian severity. Necessarily, I led a Spartan existence, reduced to the simplest food and most meagre forms of entertainment.

Yet I was quite happy, and did not, at first, feel like changing my lot with anybody. The composers were my friends. Everybody in the place knew, and was friendly to, the little reporter. The only fly in the ointment was the suspicion, not easy to eradicate, that my landladies, so far from making money out of me, were considerably out of pocket. As they could not live on me who had nothing, I had, perforce, to live on them who had very little either. Flixton, in those early days, did not lend itself either to wild life or to the modes of dissipation that go with night club indulgence. My memory of the pretty suburb is that it went to bed early and rose early, and that, in between, the church bells rang and works of charity were performed. In truth, Flixton was inhabited by righteous, God-fearing people, whose way of life rebuked the restless yearnings in my own breast for the stronger meat of less exemplary surroundings—yearnings which not even the low diet to which I was now accustomed could stifle.

Farther away from Flixton, yet still within the compass of our circulation, existence took on more expansive airs. People drank, made merry at tavern tournaments, flirted and were freely amenable to human weakness. When, in my search for news, I crossed the boundaries I came on to the firm's expenses sheet. I could spend up to a shilling. Beyond that I took grave risks of being repudiated. Publicans of my acquaintance offered me free drink, but I kept my pride and they kept their beer, though they would have been well paid by the amusement of seeing the little reporter tipsy.

After six months with Spalding I jumped at an opening at Hulton's, where they were seeking an apprentice to journalism. The starting salary was to be 10s. a week, increasing at the end of five years to £3 a week. I would have preferred to begin at the far end, but, in money matters, Withy Grove was insensible to Barrie-like suggestions.

Spalding, so that I should stop, got the boss to offer me the equivalent of the Hultons' money. Neither this, nor any other bait, could hold me. True, I liked Spalding, who behaved to me more like an elder brother than a master, but I had had enough



of local journalism, and was heartily sick of reading aloud proofs of patent medicine advertisements, and studying the faces of women who had been miraculously cured of their physical ills. I was more inclined to be interested in women of perfect health, who required, not to be cured, but to be kissed.

## CHAPTER II

### “ THE QUID AND HALF-QUID ”

THE proprietor's original intention, when I arrived in Withy Grove, was that I should join the *Sporting Chronicle*, but old man Hulton, after looking at me shrewdly up and down his beard, decided I would be a better recruit for the newly started *Evening Chronicle*, to which venture, so the story ran, he had been persuaded by his son after a sharp tussle. Consenting, he argued it out in this fashion :

“ We are doing well with the *Sporting Chronicle*, the *Sunday Chronicle* and the *Athletic News*, but my boy Teddy says time has come for an ‘ evening.’ He may be right and he may be wrong, but Teddy is a good boy. I suppose I shall have to give him £25,000 to play around with.”

From the first I felt particularly drawn to the old fellow, who never pretended to be other than a plain man who had struck lucky. Originally a bill-setter for the *Manchester Guardian*, he had built up a fine business out of the profits of a sporting tissue which had gone well in sport-mad Manchester. With his white pointed beard, soft manner of speaking and gentle expression, he looked benevolence personified,—kindness, as it were, oozing from every pore in his body. If, in the human conflict, he were less good-natured than he looked, yet judged by ordinary standards little amiss could be found in him, always providing, of course, that no occasion for tackling him about money matters presented itself. Then, I am afraid, his dilatory, evasive tactics were calculated to vex the soul of a saint. In Withy Grove, to seek a rise, you had, even when most favoured by fortune, several barriers to overcome, one more difficult than another. The father referred you to the son ; the son passed you back to the father. In the last resource you were invited to wait until the balance-sheet came out. The amount at stake might only be 5s. ; it made no difference.

I was lucky. I had most of the rises in my agreement ante-dated, and, in a period when father and son were particularly pleased with me, I secured from each the promise of as much as a pound rise, which would bring me well within sight of the £3 limit. Whether these promised rises were meant to be consecutive or concurrent, I had no means of finding out. I was more

set on the problem of getting one or other of the promises ratified. As the weeks sped by without any tangible evidence that I was likely to "touch," I resolved on a desperate expedient. I went to the father and said, "You have promised me a rise of £1; pay me 5s. at once and I will be satisfied." Being a good business man, he nodded his head, "That's done!" Having got his authority for the cashier, I then went to the son and suggested the same bargain to him. A chip of the old block, he just as quickly accepted. Thus 10s. of my shadowy £1 materialised. I was content; the Hultons considered they had done a smart piece of business, the world continued to go round as usual, and Friday, pay day, to arrive with exasperating slowness.

If there was anything old man Hulton liked better than his son, it was having his own way. Under all circumstances he would have the door leading to the machine-room left open. Unfortunately, when it was open, the papers in an adjoining room blew about and even vanished through the window. The commotion became so great that, despite his express orders, the forbidden door was closed. He raged, fumed, stormed, spluttered. *He would be minded.* Once more the door was opened. This time to protect the papers a £50 screen from his own room was brought down, but, being in everybody's path and constantly falling over, was heartily cursed. As Hulton did not like to see his expensive screen ruined, he arranged for a costly leaded-pane partition to be erected; thereafter the door could safely be left open, the screen restored to its normal position, and, what was still more important, the old man feel satisfied that, as from him, *orders were orders.*

In time the placid, gentle-voiced, yet determined, father was coaxed to leave more and more of the control to his clever son, but on two points he remained adamant: there must be no smoking on the stairways, and no interference with the system of thermometers. To be caught smoking on the stairways in Withy Grove was equivalent to dropping the Tablets of the Law; to have the thermometer in your department missing, or out of order, was gross sacrilege. A specially instructed foreman looked after the thermometers. His orders were: when the mercury went below sixty degrees the windows were to be shut; when the mercury rose above sixty degrees they were to be opened. The argument was that in extremes of temperature men worked badly. If too cold, they would waste time warming their hands; if too warm, they would feel drowsy and do even less work.

I did not think the young man as picturesque a character as

his father. On the other hand, if less pliable and more self-opinionated, he disposed of a wider range of ability and subtlety. What the father did by instinct, the son did by calculation. In his last days papa Hulton dressed extremely well, but he never reached the stylish heights of his offspring, who excelled in marvellous silk ties and waistcoats cut very low. I would often catch the father's admiring eye bent on his son's smart get-up.

Alike with Lord Northcliffe, from whom he took many of his later ideas, adapting them to local needs, Teddy Hulton cultivated the habit of unexpectedly dropping in on his business to test whether everything was up to concert pitch. There was a particular bank holiday when, striding into the advertisement building, he expressed himself profoundly disturbed by the paucity of signs directing people where to hand in their advertisements. More pointers were necessary; a score or more large enamel hands must be ordered at once. As a matter of discretion the responsible "head" first obtained an estimate. It came to £20—a lot of money for pointers. Wisdom dictated that Hulton should be invited to initial the estimate, but one look at the total was enough for him. The enthusiasm for hands evaporated even more swiftly than it had arisen.

For me, the first Hulton apprentice, he displayed to the last some vestige of sentimental regard which I genuinely reciprocated, though there was not too much in common between us. Long after I had left the firm, and Manchester was fast becoming a dim memory, I would be running into Teddy, to find him always ready for a friendly chat. For quickness' sake we would go into De Keyser's Hotel on the Embankment, his invariable drink being a brandy-and-soda. He usually carried a case of cigars with him, but I prevailed on him to try mine, spoils of Christmas, having been solemnly warned about the indifferent brand he affected. The idea that I should prefer my own cigars cynically amused him who had wealth to buy the very best. His mirth once aroused, he sensibly relaxed, forgot that he was an important newspaper proprietor, and met me on a human level where it was possible to talk like equals.

If his humour lacked the life and impish quality of Lord Northcliffe's characteristic banter, and often was little more than the forced gaiety of a sick man, it had on occasion a Lancashire spice and vigour of its own. As a Lancashire man, I understood and appreciated better than any Londoner the racy Northern idiomatic phrase, which, in discussion, can be so eloquent and decisive. Long before the fact became generally known, I sensed in Hulton an acutely ailing man, who was getting far less pleasure

out of life than one with his large possessions and opportunities could reasonably expect. One way and another I felt sorry for him. I think he grasped that I was sympathetic, for more than once he signified a desire to be of service to me.

When I was Editor of *Reynolds's*—for the purpose of continuity I am temporarily skipping the years—we had frequent conversations about the *Sunday Chronicle*. He was not prepared to print in London, and I was not inclined to return to Manchester, so our talks came to naught, though in the light they threw on his stubborn character they were not without their value. Later he sought to find other openings for me. Teddy—I am using the familiar, perhaps irreverent, term in favour with most of the older men—was curious to know why certain London papers did so well, particularly the Harmsworth Press. A free-lance at the time, my mouth was not shut, and the reply which again and again I gave him was, "The Harmsworths get the best work because they pay their staff and contributors the highest current rates in journalism."

"But I am ready to pay as much as anybody," was his vehement reply, and for a few seconds he looked as if he meant it. I will go further, and take an oath that, as he spoke, he was actually persuading himself that he was in deadly earnest. But the excitable Hulton of the morning was one person, and the calm, level-headed Hulton of the afternoon quite another person. All too well I knew, once his mood sobered, that he would obstinately fall back on the firmly held and convenient view that, in comparison with men from the provinces, few London journalists were worth their salt.

I can still hear him saying that he was tired of the old names he saw everywhere in print—Edgar Wallace, Bart Kennedy, etc., etc. Anybody could get them—by paying. What he wanted was new men—new men and new ideas. Let them be produced, even if the price to be paid were of astronomical proportions. The solemn look on his face gave the assurance that he was serious. *New men at any price.* That was the slogan—for the moment.

A. E. Wilson,<sup>1</sup> one of the numerous Editors of *Ideas*, rose handsomely to the occasion. He took Hulton at his word, found new writers, and arranged fees, not at all out of the way. With confidence he waited for Hulton's reactions, which were not long delayed. "What the devil do you mean," he thundered, "paying unknown writers a pound a column?" So ended that particular day's lesson, with one more Hulton editor wiser for the experience.

<sup>1</sup> Now the well-known dramatic critic of *The Star*.

Teddy, who once thought to rival the Amalgamated Press with an opposition venture for which he would supply the cash and Edgar Wallace the brains, had, at times, curious notions how certain publications could be run. He thought of an Annual as a spare-time job for an editor greedy for work, but as no Hulton editor could be found with any spare time the job went begging. That months of special preparation, as well as a staff of trained writers, would be needed to make a success of the proposition, was not exactly calculated to produce a queue of willing eligibles.

With all these contradictory elements in his personality, *naïveté* and shrewdness, impulse and caution, crowding in and disputing with one another, Teddy furnished an interesting study for the connoisseur of character. Except when annoyed he had, like his father, a pleasant, soft voice and an inviting, bland manner. But attempt to presume on that superficial gentleness, and off blew your head! He was particularly "down" on people who came to him with schemes for which they made out all sorts of specious claims. He would listen until they had finished, his patience unruffled, his demeanour apparently friendly; induce them once more to repeat their confident assertion that success was a certainty; then, if it was a particularly bad case of bluffing, would turn on his smooth-tongued visitors with the withering taunt, "You *must* think I'm a d—— fool."

If Teddy had his unkind critics, equally, he had his admirers. They, more than anybody else, saw beneath the surface the sterling qualities which had helped to develop, on sound, if not very original lines, a fine business of unusual magnitude. They alone were just to him, since they made allowance for the trials and tribulations of one who dwelt on the very edge of the grave. Some weeks before his death, being accidentally met at Ascot by Hannen Swaffer who ventured to congratulate him on looking much better, the doomed newspaper proprietor shook his head. "You are wrong," he said. "I am dying, and I am the most miserable man on earth." A baronetcy to his name, and with everything that wealth could command within his power, he knew his life was rapidly and uncontrollably slipping away. How could he help feeling *miserable*?

For my part I retained only the pleasantest memories of the two Hultons. Five years of my youth, I remembered, had been spent under their roof. They were good years, in which a confident but ignorant boy was moulded into a journalist able, as events proved, to stand the test of London during the hectic period when Lord Northcliffe and his brother, Lord Rothermere,

Vexatus, Tityrus, etc. Tityrus in real life was Jimmy Catton, whose entertaining sport comments won the hearts of Lancashire folk, who could not have told Virgil's shepherd from Hulton himself.

When all the pseudo-Latins were functioning, ours was indeed a genteel Parnassus, little prepared to have thrust into its midst the acrid-mouthed T. W. H. Crosland, who came and went with the sudden impermanence of a meteor. Now best remembered for his skittish book, *The Unspeakable Scot*, Crosland stood professedly in awe of no man breathing, whatsoever his size, qualifications or rank. With an uncompromising attitude towards all and sundry, he coupled a ferocious and extravagantly cultivated contempt for mediocrities, journalistic or otherwise, expressing his feelings with a rude vehemence that borrowed, sometimes exhausted, the resources of a vocabulary steadfastly built up through long, bitter years. His tongue, dipped in perpetual gall, reacted to an internal dissonance that might be hidden, but never remedied. For he was a disappointed man on whose angry soul a hundred vexations preyed; one who through peevish eyes saw life largely as frustration.

How can we be certain of the reason which persuaded the Hultons to fasten such an untamed and untamable Bohemian on the comparative calm of Withy Grove? Was it merely the ambition of all Lancashire men to try everything once? Was it young Hulton's belief that he could translate the strange fellow's undoubted genius into terms of profit—recognisable coin of the realm? Whatever might be the explanation for his presence, here was the shaggy, uncouth Crosland among us, and, of all surprising things, proclaimed Editor of the *Sunday Chronicle*, apple of old man Hulton's eye.

Though he preserved to the last a primitive Yorkshire patriotism, Crosland had no love for provincials, or provincial horizons, and in his company, and beneath his spell, we Lancastrians needed all our fortitude to exorcise a humbling sense of inferiority. Under the inquiring stare of the Hultons, father and son, quizzing an alien temperament, he remained stolidly indifferent. They looked at him, and he looked at them. No word was said. They passed on to survey older examples of the flock more accommodated to the Withy Grove fauna, but in their hearts, I am sure, all the months Crosland abode with them, remained fear and foreboding, as if they sensed a cuckoo's egg was being hatched in their placid song-bird's nest.

Meanwhile, Boanerges with shameful irreverence had christened father and son, "the quid and the half-quid." One gathered

from his lively and epithet-encrusted conversation that our narrow and parochial Withy Grove values were all wrong, that what we cherished was the dual product of ignorance and lack of originality. The leading articles distressed him. Why always have the same hackneyed themes? Who gave a hang for dull politics? *Should poets sleep on mantelpieces?*—that was a subject to make Manchester talk. Apprised of this startling intention old man Hulton shook his head. He wanted, not freakishness, but something solid into which the merchants of Cottonopolis could get their teeth. How little Papa Hulton knew his Editor! To whom, more than Crosland, were merchants and millionaires an abomination? I had Crosland's word that in any crowd he could spot with unfailing instinct the moneyed species. "Show me a clean-shaven man in a new suit; let him have yellow gloves in his hand and a thin watch-chain across his waistcoat, and I will lay odds he is either a millionaire or a millionaire's brother." So he boasted, and there was none to say him "nay."

There is a seasoned Crosland anecdotage belonging to this fabulous Withy Grove period, on which many before me have drawn; yet, unless one compares notes with "Bucky" Taylor, who worked by his side, a precaution I have been careful to take, one is apt to lose the essential flavour or finer parts of some of the stories, here, admittedly not all told for the first time.

Should we be surprised that Crosland soon fell foul of the "No smoking on the stairways" regulation? "Papa" caught him red-handed. "Don't you know, Mr. Crosland, that you have got your pipe in your mouth?" he murmured in his slow, rebuking tones. "And where would you have me put it?" was the unabashed retort.

Slaking his thirst at *The Crosby*, hard by the office, one Saturday evening, he was warned by an intelligent boy that the office copy-basket was stacked up with matter. "Anything particular?"—"Yes, a Russian disaster, with several hundreds killed." Crosland looked relieved. "Don't worry, my lad," he shouted back. "The Russian edition has gone!"

When Rosebery made one of his important Saturday evening speeches, Crosland sub-edited the copy himself, and by studious paraphrases compressed what should have occupied five columns into the space of a column and a half. Seeing how much fuller the other papers had reported Rosebery, the Hultons were decidedly annoyed, and demanded an explanation. This is what



Crosland said : " Rosebery may be a good orator, but he does not know a damn thing about the public that reads newspapers. They would never have understood half of what was meant by the long-winded, ornate sentences which came in on Saturday night ; so I changed them into decent, readable English. When I had done, and not before, they could grasp what the fellow was after. Rosebery should thank me for rendering him a great service, seeing how much the better writer of the two I am."

" Flummoxed " is perhaps the aptest word to convey the bewildered feelings of the Hultons, as they listened to this unsuspected explanation.

Over at *The Crosby*, another day, Crosland heard a fellow-Editor moan that he was stumped for a sonnet for his leader page, due to press in an hour. " A sovereign I write your sonnet in time ? " roared Crosland.

" —Taken ! "

Resting a piece of paper on the bar counter, Crosland, line by line, with scarcely a pause, fashioned a sonnet, fit, I might say, for any anthology. As he finished the last line the paper was snatched out of his hand ; across the street flew the delighted colleague, to return, some minutes later, with the grateful tidings that the edition had been caught with the sonnet safely in it. What more suitable than champagne, paid for out of the sovereign, to crown this astonishing virtuosity ?

All things considered, it was not surprising that Crosland should have had a short life at Withy Grove, but it *was* remarkable that later he should enjoy a much longer life at the Hulton establishment in London. One had thought that the realistic younger Hulton would have shrunk from further experiments with the obstreperous genius. For this indulgence Crosland had to thank the then London Editor-in-Chief, the sympathetic Jimmy Heddle, in whose nature ran a marked vein of sentimentality.

In the last phase, when he stood in sore need, both Heddle and Hannen Swaffer were to prove warm friends of Crosland. Swaffer, editing the *Sunday Dispatch* during the War, regularly printed a sonnet from Crosland, a risky thing to do, in view of Lord Northcliffe's objection to bohemians of his description. To satisfy his susceptibilities, payment for the sonnet, ten pounds a week, was made into his hand, thereby dispensing with the formality of a call at the pay desk. Cashiers were among the numerous functionaries whom Crosland pretended heartily to despise. One did not require to be a good judge of literary merit to recognise

in Crosland's poetical contribution something that put our puny efforts to shame. The fierce fellow was then living at the Hôtel de l'Europe in Leicester Square, chosen, he explained, for peace and quietness, though the centre of theatrical and cosmopolitan life would never have occurred to me as an ideal spot for repose.

Whenever I met him it was to exchange piquant memories of Withy Grove, which were at least amusing contrasted with the bitter stuff that eternally flowed from his grey and smitten soul. He regarded the newer generation of journalists as a pale, anæmic, unlettered collection of nobodies, and in his references to them manufactured adjectives for which the great Dr. Johnson would have been right loyally thankful. To me his attitude was fairly non-committal. He thought I was a hard-working journalist—nothing more. I listened—that was some excuse for my existence. I was sympathetic—that saved me from abuse. It would be easy to be critical of Crosland, whose grievous faults could not be disguised, but as I am only interested in him as a literary man, and as an “original,” I have no occasion to add to my words. Whoever cannot recognise his poetical flair, as well as his gift for crisp, vigorous and solid home-spun prose, is either too prejudiced to be a judge, or lacks the faculty for appreciating talent that is not shouted from the house-tops.

Just before he died Crosland sent his last sonnet to Swaffer, who had placed funds at his disposal so that he might spend his last remaining days in the Riviera sun. When Swaffer read the sonnet he saw there was a line missing. Reminded of the omission, Crosland, who was dying, realised that in recopying the lines from the original draft he had inadvertently skipped one. This missing line he sent along on a separate piece of paper, together with a pathetic note to the effect that, in his dreadfully enfeebled state, writing out the composition afresh had occupied him many hours. Not the least melancholy feature of Crosland's pitiful ending was that he should have reached the land of sunshine, and yet, by all too frequently sitting in the Casino, wilfully cheated himself of the sun. Ever the lure of the tables remained stronger than the appeal of the fresh air and the bright skies.

If my impressions remain faithful, journalists, thirty years ago, possessed more of the joy of life than is the case to-day. Rarely did they worry over the future, though of very few might it be said that a robust outlook was fortified by substantial savings. The difference between the two generations was largely related to temperament. With superb aplomb the men of my youth lived

for the hour. Such feasts of merriment as I witnessed in Manchester were foreign to the London scene of my more recent years. In a few London wine-taverns bohemians of sorts might attempt convivial nights, but compared with the mirthful occasions in Withy Grove when I was a boy they were thin-blooded carousals. We humble units of the Hulton team may not have earned much money, but in the real sense of the term we certainly had a good time. If there be any truth in the national reputation for dourness, the large Scottish element betrayed it by a liveliness which left the rest of the company in eclipse. A round of drinks was the prelude to a hearty festival of laughter and seasoned wit, and, once we had overcome the dread ordeal of settling who should be the first to pay, everything went swimmingly. As for myself, broad repartee afforded the sole protection against the intensely nationalistic humour of my Scottish friends, not a few of whose gibes were in the nature of mild caricature of my supposed traits. When the stockpot of jokes had temporarily run dry, and pointed, personal references were in danger of being misunderstood, the solemn assurance that we were all Scots together (myself included) soon righted the situation.

To eke out my funds to the best advantage I made ingenuity the handmaiden of necessity. I restricted myself to an all-beer-and-meal route: with every glass or bottle of beer went a free food dish. In Manchester in the late nineties, competition in the licensed trade having reached extraordinary lengths, "something for nothing" facilities for those who "knew the ropes" were to be found in abundance. At the cost of ninepence—almost the price of one bottle of beer to-day—I might provide myself with three half-pints of Bass, a steaming plate of pea soup, a generous helping of Irish stew, and, as a filling savoury, a healthy whack of appetising Welsh rarebit. Having a twinkle in my eye which was reciprocated the other side of the counter, I generally won hefty portions. At any rate, by the time I reached Salford, whose beneficent activities and less admirable peccadilloes I covered for the *Evening Chronicle*, I was replete, yet dignified. Now, if I were to drink three bottles of Bass, I should quickly feel tipsy; then, the allowance had not the slightest effect on me, except, perhaps to give me a likeable warm feeling at the pit of the stomach. The aristocrats of the profession, of course, scorned such slim expedients. They were used to a sit-down luncheon served in proper style, but the £2-a-week Hulton apprentice, standing on scant ceremony, managed at infinitely less cost to live almost as well. More food would have been folly, especially as beer was so fattening.

Not different from other journalists, I regarded the *Manchester Guardian* with almost religious awe, but the sight of the *Guardian* men in the flesh humanised the sensation. There was “much of a muchness” about them, although they tended to look as solemn as owls, and to go about with a weighty air, suggestive of crushing responsibilities. At first they regarded me as a saucy upstart, and I shall never forget the look on the face of one whom I invited to accompany me on the beer-and-meal round. He was pained both by the impertinence and by the vulgarity of the invitation, and had there been less *gaminerie* in my nature, I must have been terribly upset by his scandalised expression. It interested me to find in one of the younger reporters an old Manchester Grammar School *confrère*. With him, at any rate, I had no need to be on my best behaviour. I could afford to be quite natural. With gratitude I remember that he treated me almost as an equal, what little he kept in hand being, of course, for emergencies.

However, when the *Guardian* fellows realised there was little inherent vice in me, they perceptibly thawed, and the last year or two of my stay in Manchester I could consider them as friends, even if they still remained a shade dubious about my “touchability.” They interested me as men of unusual ability and character, idiosyncratic like my own father. I remember an unassuming *Guardian* reporter who invariably took a Greek lexicon with him to the football match, reminding me of Cecil Rhodes, who, when he first settled among the Kimberley miners, made the same choice of reading matter. C. P. Scott was something apart; like the Ark of the Covenant—unapproachable. If ever I saw him in the Palatine Road, scurrying along, either on foot or on a bicycle, it pleased me to think that we shared a common liking for this most beautiful of Manchester highways, which by night in the misty light, with all the architectural effects softened and the shadows of the great overhanging trees poetically distributed, carried a charmed and unforgettable appeal.

During the War, while detained at Yokohama, the only three English papers I could find were, *The Daily Mail*, *The Times Weekly Edition* and the *Manchester Guardian*, and when I inquired why C. P. Scott’s paper came there, they told me it was because many Manchester men were settled in this part of the Far East.

Leg-pulling was an art in which Manchester journalists specialised, and I am not ashamed to say that they numbered me among their victims. When Oldham Wakes week came round I was

advised to go there. In view of my youth, not only should I be welcome at the festival, but meet the pick of Lancashire feminine beauty, which during this holiday made Oldham its rendezvous. I was flattered at these assurances, and along with another office simpleton raced off to Oldham. Our arrival caused no sensation. Nobody met us at the station, nobody asked us to dinner ; nobody, in fact, took the slightest notice of us. My youth, and my friend's warming eye, were wasted in that chilly climate. The only living person to exchange human speech with us was an unromantic, humourless, local police-sergeant, who told us that we had missed the last Manchester train, and that we should never get a room in Oldham, everywhere being booked up. That police-sergeant certainly knew his Oldham. No hotel would take us in, and as the only thing left to do, we started walking back, a mere detail of ten miles on far from "velvety" roads.

I am a first-class walker when I feel exhilarated. After trudging the Oldham streets for hours to no purpose, and now being called upon to extend myself for another ten miles, I was not in the least exhilarated. By the time we reached the working-class neighbourhood of Miles Platting, I was constrained owing to sheer exhaustion to throw in my hand. I could not walk another inch. A suspicious police constable inquired our trouble. His brain quickened by a small tip, he directed us to a lodging-house, happily close by. It was kept by an enterprising sweep who swept chimneys during the day. When he opened the door to us he was in his bare feet. I had not been used to such a reception, and would have preferred him stockinged, but at that hour of the morning I could not very well complain, or stand on etiquette. We had first to satisfy him that we had sufficient money to pay for our accommodation ; after which we were requested to follow him upstairs to a long corridor consisting of three rooms knocked into one. Of the fifteen beds it contained, only ours were unoccupied. When I suggested undressing my friend bade me not to be fussy, and save for taking off our boots, we slept as we were, and soundly. Too soundly for the landlord's liking, for, roughly shaking us up, he sarcastically inquired whether we wanted dinner or breakfast. Once aroused, we wanted nothing except to be gone. We paid him the 6d. each he demanded, not an excessive charge under the circumstances, and caught the tramway car back to Manchester. When our leg-pulling colleagues asked how we had enjoyed ourselves, we replied that we had had the time of our lives. It was true.

. . . . .

The ruling topic in Withy Grove, as in Manchester generally, was how to make the Ship Canal pay. At nineteen years of age, I could, of course, be expected to know the ins and outs of a problem which defied the wits of the brainiest man alive to solve. When I mentioned the idea of writing a series of articles on the subject, the younger Hulton did not stop to ask himself whether my brain was adequately furnished: he said it was an excellent notion and I must begin straight away. Accordingly I advised the chief reporter, G. W. Hubbard<sup>1</sup>—for many years the respected Editor of the *Birmingham Daily Post*—that I should be away a week and, given his blessing, departed on my difficult errand. The Ship Canal people helped me with the obvious facts, but the key to the situation lay not in Manchester, but in Liverpool. So long as the cotton shippers had inducements to use Liverpool, instead of Manchester direct, so long would the Ship Canal be deprived of a vast amount of profitable sea-going traffic legitimately its own. The first thing to find out was how Liverpool could be checkmated. Tackling the big Liverpool shipowners, and getting them to offer suggestions and answer questions against their own interests, was a tall order. My inexperience served me. That I was embarked on an outrageous quest did not occur to my youthful mind. When the people on whom I called for information laughed derisively in my face, telling me to be off and not waste their time, I politely bowed myself out and said I would call again. They could see I was as good as my word, for I kept putting my head into their offices with what to them must have been sickening frequency. Finally my pertinacity appealed to their sportsmanlike instincts. They answered my questions, if not as frankly as I had wished, at least less guardedly than I had a right to expect, glad at any price to be rid of the pestilential Manchester nuisance. The articles I wrote were considered up to the mark. My stock rose in the estimation of the office. As I pen these sentences, I, who am more than thirty years older, tell myself that, called upon to tackle those steel-ribbed Liverpool shipowners to-day, I should with good reason shiver. Of a truth I should want some easier method of earning a livelihood. An angry Liverpool shipowner is not at all a nice man to meet.

At intervals luck usefully served my ends. When the sumptuous Midland Hotel, representing a new chapter in luxury for Manchester, was complete in all its appointments, the

<sup>1</sup> His successor, E. W. Record, was at this time serving on the *Manchester Guardian* and will remember my advent in Manchester journalism.

management, to avoid any suggestion of favouritism, fixed a day for the newspaper representatives to be taken round on a tour of inspection. To prevent the arrangement being spoilt by premature publicity on the part of any one paper, the doors were zealously guarded against all intruders. It was as difficult to pass these janitors as to enter the Vatican. Having made up my mind to be the first reporter inside the hotel, I disguised myself as a carpet layer—hitched up trousers and knee pads—and thus transformed easily gained admittance. Once inside I took hurried peeps into the different rooms, wondering all the time how I should be able to describe from memory all the intoxicating sights that met my eye. What should be my good fortune but to come across a proof of an explanatory booklet prepared for press day! My task being freed of any difficulty, the *Evening Chronicle* was able to appear a day ahead of its rivals with a long and accurate description of the splendours of the much-discussed Midland Grand Hotel.

In the long run when values assume rightful proportions, these trumpety successes are devoid of any significance. That I know. But analyse a journalist's life, and if not a series of minute triumphs and failures, what is it, then? Overlook the little scores and the little misses, and what have we left to record? Who wants three or four hundred pages of a learned disquisition on the rewards or inadequacies of a newspaper career?

. . . . .

If I had my good days, equally I had my bad days. As a young journalist I was not wholly twenty-two carat gold. Having attended a meeting of one of the local Boards of Guardians, I was walking back with a relieving officer, when, quite incidentally, he happened to mention that a number of people under his notice were complaining of the effects of something they had drunk. It was not the water, for investigation had shown it to be quite all right. As to what else it might be, no one had the faintest idea. I pricked up my ears. Here, standing out a mile, was a first-class story to fasten on at once. So, without mentioning a word to the office—or for that matter to anybody else before to-day—I proceeded to make discreet inquiries on my own account, discreet because people were suspicious of my questions, discreet because I did not wish my errand talked about. I wanted a “scoop.” I made no headway. There were strange cases of illness, but all too baffling to explain. Something the victims drank violently disagreed with them. What it was, no one with any certainty could say.

While wondering whether, after all, to inform the office, the great arsenical beer poisoning sensation burst, and there was an end to my perplexity. Manchester and Salford inhabitants were dying from poison in certain kinds of beer—poison which came from glucose inadvertently manufactured from impure sulphuric acid containing arsenic. This was the sensational story to which, all in vain, I had been given the clue. I will be fair to myself. Even if by a miracle I had stumbled on the poisoned beer explanation, would any paper in the absence of official corroboration have dared to print it. Very doubtful. Still I never got as far as putting my paper to the test. Arsenicated beer was the last thought in my head. Thereafter, for weeks, we reported the inquests held on the people who had fallen victims to the poison. Every time a case went into the papers, the thought of my great “miss” jabbed at my brain like a knife. But I kept my mouth shut, and Withy Grove’s opinion of me did not alter. It was one of the few occasions when I managed to retain a silent tongue between my teeth.

Although the Manchester climate could be as bad as its detractors made it out to be, and in the frequent fog and damp my health, never good, severely suffered, yet uppermost in my recollections are days of the loveliest sunshine, when Withy Grove was bathed in delight. The sun showed up Teddy’s newest suit, played hide-and-seek in “Papa” Hulton’s whitened beard, made the thermometer foreman restless. It gilded “Bucky” Taylor’s red tie, sent Benny Bennison’s<sup>1</sup> thoughts gardening, caused old Tom Patterson—we had taken him from the *Glasgow Citizen*—to tug viciously at his whiskers, what time, striding up and down the room, he bade imaginary reporters, “get to Hell out of this!” Last, but not least, the Manchester sun filled me with a sense of the urgency and wonder of a young man’s life.

If there was ugliness in Manchester, I turned my head away, and looked where the city in which I was born took on a goodly aspect. Tramping the familiar all-beer-and-food route I felt my soul gay within me. In the exuberance of my spirits, like a troubadour of old, I would sing to myself snatches of song, and, after three bottles of Bass, one who is eighteen does feel like song. Ah! they were enviable days, when life waved to me with rainbows and I trod the way of enchantment! On £2 a week I was passing rich, with always an odd half-crown to spare for tea at Parker’s in St. Anne’s Square—not always by

<sup>1</sup> The well-known sporting writer. Now with the *Evening Standard*.



myself—where on Tuesdays and Fridays the handsome daughters of Manchester's merchant princes met to renew agreeable acquaintanceships, and, between whiles, inspect the latest fashions from London and Paris.

When I found the sunshine too tempting to be cooped up in dreary coroners' courts, an obliging colleague on another paper did my work, and I played truant, sampling the golden hours with a gourmand's keenness. Over tea at Parker's, one bright afternoon, I looked up to catch the cold eye of the younger Hulton upon me. He beckoned me over to his table. Fortunately I was alone ; to be truthful, a little before my time. "What on earth are you doing here at this hour of the day ?" he asked, not too encouragingly. I spoke the first words that came into my head. "I am thinking, Mr. Hulton," I quickly answered. Assured I was not attempting to make game of him, he relaxed, and with an amused smile said, "Well, take my advice : Do your thinking in a more suitable place." I thanked him, promptly paid the bill, and took my departure. I heard no more of the incident. After all, what was there wrong in a journalist doing a bout of thinking over a cup of tea ? Could I help the occasion being a particularly fine afternoon, and the place a particularly agreeable restaurant ?

Beyond the theatre and the concert hall, the night life of Manchester yielded little variety and less opportunity in the way of amusement. If you understood music well, you got the office tickets and patronised the Hallé concerts. Afterwards there might be supper. I concentrated on the music-halls, especially those where I had free entry. They were cheaper. For supper I went to a *delicatessen* by the name of Bianca. We called it "Casey's"—Casey-bianca !

There were times when I took dinner with a wealthy Manchester cotton-broker, who, if we had chicken, would order two birds, so that each might take the titbits he fancied. He had a mock horror of Jews, and in my presence was always lamenting the fact that God had missed His chance when He had the Israelites in the Red Sea.

I might spend an hour watching a game of chess. When Dr. Lasker, then mathematical tutor at Owens College, played Janowsky, the French champion, the news-boys in Cross Street ran by, shouting, "Test Match, Test Match." Pleased, Lasker turned to his opponent, and said, "They're crazy about chess here. Just fancy the news-boys calling out our match !" He thought they were shouting, "Chess Match."

While playing in Manchester, the great violinist, Dr. Joachim, allowed me to interview him. He was a little vague about his early days, and, to refresh his memory, kept referring to a German book which he carried about with him. His life had begun six years before Queen Victoria ascended the throne. As he confessed his Jewish origin, the interview seemed particularly appropriate for the *Jewish Chronicle*, which printed it in full. To this day my recollection of Joachim remains vivid and real; such a kind, fatherly man, overwhelmed, despite his fame, to be questioned by one so young as myself. I had the good sense to be perfectly frank with him. That struck the right note. I said a good interview with a celebrity of his order would be a distinct feather in my cap; whereupon he showed the utmost eagerness to provide me with the right material. Gratefully I continue to think of him as a great artist and a great gentleman.

Keenly interested in oratory I had joined a debating society. Seldom did I miss the opportunity of hearing a good preacher. I was present when the Rev. Hugh Black, the Edinburgh divine who was such a great favourite with the late Lord Rosebery, paid one of his rare visits to Manchester and preached to a crowded congregation. That was long before we lost him to America. In the pulpit, with his coal-black locks, his ascetic poet's face, and his deep, bass voice impregnated with the unmistakable Scottish birr, the impression he made was one not easily effaced. I shut my eyes and out of the dim past he advances towards me, as I knew him then. He has an appropriate image of the end of the world, haunting words . . . “When the sun is old and the world grows cold.” The magic there was in him, as in any preacher of quality! You who read these lines, do you remember Spurgeon's admonitory words to his students? “If a man is going to sleep in my congregation, don't wake him up: wake *me* up.”

Near my home was the famous Catholic church, the Holy Name, where, before he moved to Farm Street, Mayfair, Father Vaughan, tall, handsome, imperious, aristocratic-looking, was the main attraction.

Here began an acquaintance with the popular Jesuit which, continued in London, was to last until his death. In memory of our Manchester association he was often willing to supply me with provender in the shape of articles of “The Sins of Mayfair” type, highly favoured by newspapers of the kind I served. The actual process of extracting the articles from the ardent

priest was an exercise in cool patience, passionless temper and sympathetic understanding.

Some people, I imagine, would have called Father Vaughan vain. If so, his vanity was of the most harmless and pardonable description. He liked hearing his own resonant voice, and in the little refectory in Farm Street, bare of furniture and other worldly accessories, rewarded my attentive ear with decorative and fluent sentences, which, to meet his fondness for the ecstasies of musical sound, I would be required to read over to him again and again. "Splendid," I might cry in honest encouragement. Father Vaughan would straighten his back, look pleased, and reply, "Do you think it good?"—just a touch of pride in his accent—"Then read me what you have down, once more." And once more, as I strove to do justice to the eloquent phrases, the tiny room echoed the throb in my voice. Or, if the fancy took him, Father Vaughan, his eyes half-closed, would roll out from the beginning his own swelling cadences, and, to one suitably imaginative, the bare and cramped interior might seem steeped in sweet melody that rose and fell like organ notes heard from a distance.

To disengage the rapt priest from his perfervid conceptions, and gently lead him on to a level where less exalted prose, more in keeping with my purpose, was forthcoming, might almost seem an act of cruelty; yet, when I had to perform that necessary office, I pride myself that I did it with a delicacy that avoided offence. Once the spell was broken we quickly mastered our task. Fluent commonplaces came as rapidly as decorative sentences had come slowly, but that magnificent presence, and that sonorous voice from which the customary rapture had fled, paired too indifferently for real satisfaction at the turn in the proceedings.

While he had been in his element a scent hung upon the air; now the atmosphere was stale and ordinary. For to bring Father Vaughan down to my saleable journalism was wilfully to forget that his personality and *panache* called exclusively for a dramatic setting, rich in tone and colouring, with something of the glittering, emotional note of the Italian Renaissance. Towards the end of his life he must have felt the incongruity of articles and interviews lending themselves to startling publicity. He became less accessible, weary even of me, an old friend, and of the newspaper prominence into which, possibly against his better judgment, he felt I dragged him. Withal there were days, rare as sunny afternoons in December, when he would recapture the old turgid spirit, and the passion to speak to a larger audience than that of Farm Street would again swell his ageing veins. Then he was glad to renew acquaintance with me, so often his prompter, ready,

may eager, to reward my ears with sonorous rhythms into which a measure of harshness was just beginning to creep.

Yet I swear I had a fondness for Father Vaughan dependent on something more than his usefulness to me. For nearly a lifetime we had known one another. With him I could easily forget I was a journalist, for, articles apart, our conversation traversed the widest range of subjects. While he was thinking out his bejewelled sentences, my mind in reverie would go back to the old Manchester years, when, as he impressed me then, his fine clear-cut features and proud lips spoke of the genuine aristocrat. To recognise that he had grown old, who with flashing eye had been so full of imperious vitality, and to remember that the admiring boy who, open-mouthed, had listened to his soaring oratory would similarly age, was to be conscious of the impermanence of all human things, a sad truth which we are apt to forget when we are young. But, more painful than any reflection born while he was alive, was the poignant thought, ever-present after his death, that never again for my delight would that eloquent voice roll forth its vibrant music, never again in my journalistic commerce would the little, dun refectory at Farm Street have significance and a purpose. About that corner of the church, while Father Vaughan lived, clung some kind of magic. That the charm would no more exert its spell was a bitter conclusion which, only with the greatest reluctance, could my mind be induced to accept. For even more than I had suspected, I liked the man, and so sincerely mourned his passing.

## CHAPTER III

### I TRY TO TELL THE TRUTH

**T**HOUGH in Withy Grove one worked in an office of sport-loving traditions, and, if one were loyal, subscribed whole-heartedly to the different manly enthusiasms, I must confess that the only form of sport which in any degree appealed to me was cricket. I might have enjoyed football, had not my father's strap effectively cured me of an early predisposition in that direction. To cricket he did not object; hence I was permitted to like this more genteel pastime.

One of my heroes was Johnny Briggs, the famous little all-round player who was such a natural figure of comedy. Even when his health flagged he still played to maintain his physical vigour and keep up his interest in life. In his country retreat, away from the cheering crowds to which he had long been accustomed, he looked pathetically lonely and sad. Where now was the roar of a thousand brazen throats that had been wont to greet his arrival on the field? Gone! and with it the characteristic smile by which he repaid that affectionate greeting. Yet there remained, what kindly nature would never take away, the provocative quality of his unconscious antics. Once again I laughed to see his back view, laughed almost as heartily as when I had seen him contrasted with burly W. G. Grace, beard in full sail in the Old Trafford breeze. Whatever change the years might work, they left Johnny his delicious stance. But an idol of the crowd who has made his farewell bow to the large world, and appears nervously before a tiny world void of electricity, too vividly mirrors the transience of human glory to be cheerful companionship. If I might laugh to watch him enter the field, yet each time I came away, I felt dispirited, burdened with the inescapable conviction that, at the end of the longest and most wonderful innings, awaited disillusionment and tears.

Had the detective instinct in Withy Grove been fully developed, they must surely have found out that I knew little about football and cared less. Happily they remained blissfully ignorant of my

shortcomings, and I was appointed journalistic High Priest to the incomparable Manchester United who played at Clayton. If I had not much football in me, I had plenty of cunning. To cover up my deficiencies I relied on a local maniac—mad on this one point of football. With astonishing fidelity he followed every move in the game; knew who fouled whom, had the names of the goal-scorers on the tip of his tongue almost before the ball was in the net, shouted familiar encouragements to the home giants, and, when they failed his high hopes, roundly cursed them. At this interval of time my memory is a little indistinct; I forget how he was smuggled into the press-box. Possibly he looked like a director, or actually was a director. What I do remember is that I learned his phraseology and comments, and shouted them through the telephone to the approving murmur of a football "fan" at the other end, otherwise a shorthand writer. The office thought my reports so good that I was invited to spread myself further over the pages of the *Sunday Chronicle* and the *Athletic News*. With my route clearly charted, I could do the voyage, time and again, with ease. But keeping my ears open, I would catch the shrewd remark that the genuine inspired article was the original telephoned report. Quite right: that local maniac had the real stuff in him. I would have been hurt at any suggestion that I had not chosen my coadjutor wisely. And to think he did it all for the love of the game, for the excitement of helping a confessed duffer, for an occasional packet of cigarettes, and a more frequent glass of beer! Such men are not born any more. Peculiar to a period, they flourish, have their day and pass, without reproducing their like. What a chapter could be written on this entrancing subject!

One peaceful Saturday, with nothing in the prospect to alarm me, I caught the Clayton 'bus which, via Market Street, was to take me back to Withy Grove. Three ordinary working men, dressed in their Sunday best, followed me in, and immediately began a game, fascinating to watch, called by the innocent public, "Find the Lady," and by the unimaginative police, "The three-card trick." For some minutes I watched two of the three men winning with absurd frequency. They appeared to have no difficulty in "Finding the lady." Seeing me interested, the third man, who was the loser, asked if I would like to join in and pick up some easy money. I was quite willing. There certainly was a lot of easy money to pick up in that simple game. Unfortunately it happened to be my money. When the three men got off the

'bus, they had exactly £1 10s. of my worldly wealth with them, representing nearly the whole of the salary I had drawn the previous day. When I was older, and knew better than to be fleeced by the crudest of cardsharps, I incautiously mentioned my unflattering experience to Lord Northcliffe. He said, "Had you been in my employment at the time I would have fired you. Any reporter capable of being done by vulgar three-card tricksters is too poor an advertisement for papers of mine to retain."

There were always ways and means of earning a little more money in Manchester. Sometimes you obliged a local sports agency with a duplicate; that meant an extra 2s. 6d. or 5s. in your pocket; sometimes you obliged a solicitor with a verbatim report of a law case; that meant anything up to £10—at times more; sometimes you were given a commission by a London newspaper. One way or another I generally managed to augment my small income. I was interested not only in my earning capacity, but in the curious activities of other journalists, less fortunately placed. In several of the police courts I would come across humble scribes, who lived by recording for various local journals "drunks" and "affiliation" cases. I believe they were paid as much as a penny a line, and as little as a halfpenny. In an expansive moment one of the most accomplished of these ingenious penny-a-liners confided to me that an affiliation case was more to be desired than a "drunk," as it made a minimum three lines, compared with a possible two.

The boys who came to the courts to collect the "copy" were not particularly smart, not a patch on the slick youngsters we imported into Carmelite House. One wet morning I remember sending the *Chronicle* boy back to the office for my overcoat. An hour later, when I asked him what he had done with the coat, he explained he had taken it to my father's. Further pressed, he stated that on the way to the court he had seen the name "Falk" over a shop door, and, concluding it must be my home, had left it there. Incredible but true!

On reaching the age of twenty-one, by virtue of the terms of my agreement, I became entitled to £3 a week. To hear the younger Hulton say that I was worth so much was distinctly encouraging. When I suggested that I would like to celebrate my coming-of-age by a tour of Canada and the United States, not only had he no objection to raise, but expressed willingness to

pay for any articles I sent back ; moreover, if it would cheapen my travelling expenses, I might urge my connection with the firm. Actually the three months' trip, which I paid for out of my own savings, cost much less than £100, for I managed to secure free steamship tickets, while across the other side I received free transport over the Canadian Pacific lines.

On the voyage out the Captain entertained us with exciting yarns culled from a lively and varied experience, and, to illustrate an episode rich in drama, took out his revolver from a drawer usually kept locked. It was supposed to be unloaded. Handling the weapon in this assurance, I foolishly pulled the trigger. Above the loud report which followed, I heard a woman's shrill, piercing shriek, "If you have killed my child, I will knife you."

For a full twenty seconds, a lifetime in the circumstances, I felt myself in a horrible stew. Supposing I had killed her child ? All sorts of unpleasant thoughts, each more horrible than the other, flashed through my mind.

When the smoke blew away, luckily for me the woman's child was seen to be unharmed, scarcely even frightened. There yet remained the problem of what had happened to the bullet. Had it found a human mark elsewhere ? Gingerly I followed the Captain into the adjoining cabin, where, a sickly smile on his face, we found the purser. He was not hurt, but had had a nasty shock. He showed us where the bullet, whizzing right past his head, had buried itself in the opposite wall. None of the parties to this distressing incident bore me any enmity, least of all the woman—a passenger like myself—whose primitive instincts I had aroused to a ferocious degree I could never have imagined possible, and after a day's interval the subject was taboo. More pleasant topics whiled the time pleasantly away, but, ever since I have had a horror of firearms, and, if a revolver were handed to me, no matter what solemn guarantee as to its harmlessness were offered, I should require, before touching the trigger, to be in a desert of the size of the Sahara. Years afterwards I could find ample excuse for this savage outburst. I remembered that moved by similar fears, Marie Antoinette, a prisoner in the Temple, forgot entirely her queenly role, and overwhelmed with shrill and unladylike abuse the men, who at the instance of the Committee of Public Safety had come to separate her from the sickly Dauphin, her last source of pleasure in life.

On my arrival in America, in common with many other unproven notabilities, I was interviewed by the reporters. Their



undoubted nose for news should have saved them from assuming I was "copy." However, I told them that I represented the Hulton group of newspapers, and in due course I read the following :

"Mr. Bernard Falk of the *Manchester Guardian* has arrived in America. He will describe our beautiful country for his paper, and will endeavour to tell the truth."

On mentioning the purpose of my visit to the Editor of *La Presse*, the influential French-Canadian paper of Montreal, I was invited to write an article on the prospects of Joseph Chamberlain's Protectionist campaign, then in full blast. As I came from the traditional home of Free Trade, I could be trusted to have my facts right. In return I was given introductions which proved of great value on the American continent.

I chose an unfortunate hour for arriving in Niagara. It was the off-season, the place empty and most of the big hotels shut. An hotel near the railway station being open, I decided to try it for food. The proprietor, a tall, solemn-faced Yankee, who was assisted by an equally tall and solemn son, the very spit of his parent, suggested I should treat myself to a small steak which he could safely advise, and, if that were any recommendation, he and his son proposed to sit down to the same dish. There was nothing wrong with my small steak, except the size. It covered the whole of a large dinner plate, and then lapped over the edges a little. Having only a moderate appetite, I assured the landlord that I could eat only a fifth of what he had put on my plate. With the gruff remark that I must be underfeeding, he transferred most of my steak on to his own plate, where there rested a still larger piece of meat. I did not notice that he experienced any difficulty with the supplemented portion ; yet, fully allowing for his height, so healthy an appetite must have been rare even in a country where they are accustomed to liberal portions, for, in addition to two pounds of meat, he put away a heaped-up plate of fried onions, and a huge potato baked in its jacket.

Jimmy White, the ex-millionaire gambler from Rochdale who perished so miserably, would not agree that my Niagara landlord had a consumption out of the ordinary. He knew of a Rochdale mill foreman, who, feeling unusually hungry one morning, polished off seventeen breakfasts of ham and eggs ordered overnight by friends, whose arrival in the local hotel breakfast-room he deliberately anticipated.

"And after this gluttony had your friend any comment to make?" I naively asked White.

"Yes," was the unsmiling reply. "He wondered whether the fifth egg was quite fresh."

Jimmy White, of course, was a deft hand at drawing the long bow, but he maintained that this story, at any rate, was true, and went so far as to mention the name of the prodigy.

In Broadway the first acquaintance I ran into was a Scottish sub-editor, who had formerly been with the Hultons. The surprise was mutual. We had an amusing time together, for if like many Scotsmen he looked deadly serious, he had yet a frivolous side to his nature which I did nothing to discourage.

Attached to my New York hotel was a luxurious hairdressing establishment, whose appeal I found dangerously tempting. Native caution, as well as the knowledge of my limited resources, bade me keep away; the sybarite in my soul, slumbering, not dead—perhaps a measure of vanity as well—awoke and urged me inside. Vanity in the end proved the victor. Once seated in one of the incredibly comfortable chairs which could be swung at will into any desired position, I had at various intervals, sometimes simultaneously, the coaxing fingers of a white-overalled magician kneading my face, pummelling my chin, thinning my hair; the gentle touch of a guinea-gold blonde manicuring my nails; and the elbow grease of a descendant of Shem enamelling my shoes—in all eighty-four minutes of enchantment. Presented with the bill, 3 dollars 50 cents, I paid up cheerfully. For once in my life I felt a hero. I strode out of that hairdressing saloon at least five inches taller; at a moderate estimate my chest measurement must have swelled two inches; and, what is more important, I smelt good, as though I had bathed in an ocean of bay-rum, for I did not know then that to be scented was to be vulgar. This killing pace I could not, dare not, keep up. The next time I appeared in the establishment I whispered in the manager's ear that funds had gone wrong, that I had only half a dollar at the most to spend with him, and that he would be required to temper the wind of his beautiful saloon to the English shorn lamb. Dear me! I was out of the chair in less than a quarter of an hour. No guinea-gold blonde gave me a disturbing look; no descendant of Shem prostrated himself at my feet; no bowing

and scraping manager opened the door, and, saddest blow of all, I was not even invited to call again. What a thing is money !

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In Chicago I spent an instructive morning in the stockyards. Versed in the pleasant mysteries of the canning process, I felt proud to have exhausted one of the wonders of civilisation. To carry me on I required a railway ticket. I was advised to go to Clark Street where there were numerous "cut-rate" shops specialising in unused railway "halves." When I hesitated I was assured that only "suckers" paid full fare. However, being a stranger in an alien country, I thought it wiser to pay full price and be safe.

I believe the name of my hotel in Chicago was the *Parker House*, rooms comfortable but dreadfully over-heated, and the terms, by American standards, reasonable. I described myself as a journalist, but by luckless inadvertence was given out as a poet. What could have contributed to this misleading impression I never could find out. Neither my appearance nor conversation suggested poetry. Two charming ladies, mother and daughter, from Denver, would not believe my protestations. They were certain I was a poet, but excessively modest. I must stay with them in Denver, and they would introduce me to the members of their literary society and to a poetess of their acquaintance. I did not accept the invitation, warmly pressed though it was. I had no mind to sail under false colours. Challenged to produce ten lines of poetry I should have been stumped, for never at any time did my muse possess metrical gifts. But more than fear of consequences kept me away from Denver ; I was reluctant to hurt the feelings of two ladies who had treated me, a newly found acquaintance from a foreign land, with astonishing kindness. For several years I corresponded with them, sending such titbits of personal and general information as I judged of interest to their gentle and cultured natures. Never had I reason to believe that their faith in my mythical poetical attainments wavered. If, as I hope and pray, they are alive at this hour, and still remember the young, dark-haired Manchester youth they met in Chicago, and befriended with sweet advice and candy, I would wager the image perpetuated in their minds is that of a dreamy, high-browed Shelley consecrated to imperishable thought. And if it gives them pleasure—why not ?

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When I was in Chicago fellow-guests were talking of the fortunes made by hall-porters at the big hotels, instancing the humble functionary at *The Blackstone*, who had retired with a bankroll of a hundred thousand dollars. With my £3 a week, what chance had I of emulating his example? Without going so far as to blame my parents for not having suggested the hotel business, it did cross my mind that my vocation might have been chosen more wisely. For long I imagined *The Blackstone* hall-porter the wealthiest of his tribe, but when I came to London I was soon undeceived. There were hall-porters in the West End who had done even better for themselves. The very tall porters who once stood outside the *Carlton* Hotel were commonly regarded as having extensive possessions, and, so recently as 1932, we had the case of Mockett, the discreet, diplomatic head porter of the *Savoy*, leaving behind more than £20,000. Which is a goodly piece of money in this, or any other, day.

## CHAPTER IV

### MY PRESENTATION SUITCASE

WHEN I returned to Manchester it was understood that the Hultons were to transfer me to their Fleet Street office, for I was ambitious and wanted London experience. Something went wrong with the arrangements, and I was told I should have to wait. I hate waiting. With or without the Hultons' assistance I meant to go to London. Accordingly I wrote former colleagues who had preceded me, asking whether they knew of any openings. Their replies were more courteous than helpful. Mostly they preached the wisdom of leaving well alone; in other words they advised me to stay in Manchester. Then I did what I have always found good policy—relied on myself. It is simpler, more efficient and gratifying, and you have nobody but yourself to thank.

Acting as my own impresario, I came up to London and started the round of the newspaper offices. "Who would buy my admirable services?" The first office I called at was the *Morning Post*, where Nicol Dunn, acclaimed fairy godfather to ambitious youth, received me in surroundings of whose austere dignities I remember most the two noble silver candlesticks flanking the desk at which he, most distinguished of editors, sat. In a room constituted on such stately lines, I was as much at home as any impudent seagull I have seen perched on the top of Cleopatra's Needle. While I spoke my piece the patience of Nicol Dunn left little to be desired. Indeed his interest appeared to be unlimited, and, if feigned, all I can say is that he was a jolly good actor. At the end of my recital, he remarked encouragingly that most likely I should prove a useful adjunct to the *Morning Post*; only there was one not altogether slight difficulty to be got over: he had made it a rule to take promising recruits in the order of their application—enter them on a waiting list. I should come 476th in the list. He was sure of the exact figure, for just prior to my arrival he had had occasion to consult the book. Did I think it worth while waiting my turn? I laughed as though at a good joke, but inwardly resented it as feeble leg-pulling. I said that if I were not No. 1 on the list he could consider me a non-starter;

whereupon he, too, smiled. A secretary with magnificent courtesy showed me out, and I was lost for ever to the great Conservative organ, with only the thought to console me that, no doubt, I should have proved a highly unsuitable recruit.

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The nearest office to the *Morning Post* was the *Sun*. In that easy and careless atmosphere I breathed freely again, felt really at home. A ruder and more primitive atmosphere greeted me. I was offered a cigarette; somebody slapped me on the back, asked whether it was still raining in Manchester when I left; an important man sitting at the end of a desk blew his nose; somebody else drank tea out of a cup, minus a handle. The place was human. So famously did I get on with the *Sun* people that, while having no salaried job to offer me, they told me that I could begin straight away on space, and, as they optimistically put it, earn a pot of money. To Manchester ears that sounded like business. Nothing about waiting lists, nothing about being 476th in order of priority. Hang up your hat that very hour and start right in. That was the *Sun* way. And to think that with all this kindness at the back of it, the *Sun* should flicker out!

Tentatively I accepted the *Sun* opening, and then walked along to Carmelite House to see Kennedy Jones who, I had been told, held a high opinion of young provincial journalists. I saw him in the well-known room on the third floor, an apartment as big as a palace audience chamber. While he lit himself a cigarette I took a quick look at the keen features, the sturdy jaw and chin, the decisive mouth, with all of which I was destined, more or less pleasantly, to become familiar. At that moment I did not fancy my task would be easy; yet what I said to him must have been convincing, for, whether or not listening to my plea he thought me an artful rogue with a facile tongue, he decided I should have a job with the firm? But where? He sent me to William Hill, the Editor of the *Weekly Dispatch*, who, after asking me a few questions, so far from being impressed, told Kennedy Jones I was no good at all. Years later fate reversed our positions. I was Editor of the *Dispatch* and William Hill an outside contributor. I wondered, then, whether he remembered the first occasion on which we met, and what happened.

As the *Dispatch* would not have me, Kennedy Jones decided I should try my luck on the *Evening News*. The question of salary being raised, I furtively suggested eight guineas as a suitable starting amount. Rather grimly Kennedy Jones replied, "Four guineas is what you are going to get." As he shook hands with







me he advised the regular application of the glove-stretcher to my brains ; otherwise, like many fellows from the provinces who thought they knew it all, I should quickly find myself in the street—out on my ear.

When I told Teddy Hulton that I was going to the London *Evening News*, he was too angry to talk civilly, reproached me with ingratitude, and finished up by alleging I was making a fool of myself. However, before I left, he was gracious enough to wish me luck, sorry not to be the means himself of my getting to London.

The time-honoured farewell in Withy Grove followed a simple but comprehensive ritual. You ordered a bottle of whisky for the company, and they handed you a presentation, *The Crosby* or *The Spread Eagle* being the stage on which, with appropriate ceremony, the exchange took place. Invited to be present at *The Spread Eagle*, I naturally jumped to the conclusion that this was my day to be rewarded, and in all confidence signalled to the waiter to produce the customary bottle. Instead of the felicitations being concerned with me, they were linked up with a colleague who was being married or divorced—which of the two happy events I was too flabbergasted by my mistake to ask. *I had wasted a whole bottle of whisky.* Office rumour then began to be busy with the name of my successor, and, when the Friday following I was invited to be present at *The Crosby*, I went the reverse way to work. I employed caution. For all I knew they were going to welcome the new man. Admirable idea, but not in my whisky ! However, to dispel my fears, which were granted natural under the circumstances, definite proof that the gift this time was intended for me was forthcoming. Inaugurated by my bottle there began an evening which I am not likely to forget as long as I live. They say I was “poorly” after it. Why such a skimmed milk of a word as “poorly” ? I was not ill : I was half dead for two whole days, with my head going round like a windmill, myself with it. The further elaboration that, at the purchase of the suitcase they gave me, I was present to see the money subscribed laid out to the best advantage no more tallies with my memory than the overt suggestion that I actually organised the presentation. Alas, they are integral parts of a persistent legend, to which I can only reply that, be the facts what they may, the suitcase cost me two bottles of good whisky, so that on balance I was little in on the deal.

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Lord Northcliffe ever cherished this Manchester saga as an exercise in whimsey, and improved it with his own inimitable touches. At the finish the story stood out, splendid and unashamed, like one of saucy Casanova's less innocent pranks. Sometimes a reference to the suitcase shared the distinction of being the leading item in the daily *communiqué*. Thus, under date, January 1920, we find Lord Northcliffe writing :—

“ Falk's Manchester friends in Fleet Street, who remember his starting out for London with the famous presentation suitcase, are beginning to realise that we have a second Dick Whittington among us.”

January 1920 ! I had been gone from Hulton's at least sixteen years. Many changes had taken place in my life, but still there survived this legend of whisky and frivolity, born of doubtful parentage, destined, perhaps, to linger on, like Blanco White's solitary sonnet on “Night,” as my one chance of being remembered hereafter.

If I was glad to come to London, Mecca of my dreams and hopes, I had cause to be sad in leaving Manchester behind. The hospitable character of its people, my own townsmen, their native wit and reliability ; even their less admirable obstinacy, were all so many passports to my heart. A hundred friends made life pleasant. The surrounding country was beautiful enough to atone for the begrimed face of Manchester itself. While the Free Reference library in King Street stood open, I never wanted for recreation. Here as a boy I first read Boccaccio and Rabelais, books on the margin line, which at my age had to be specially signed for. And here, as a youth, I studied masterpieces of prose which otherwise I might never have appreciated.

Henceforth all my associations were to be freshly formed. I had even to find a new dentist. I say dentist advisedly, because I took a curious, inexplicable interest in the progress of dental science to the extent of lending myself to experiments. When the inlay was the latest cry in dental restoration work, all one Sunday, save for hurried meals, I sat with a young practitioner while he performed the delicate task of dovetailing a piece of porcelain into a front tooth. The operation was a success. It was almost impossible to detect the join. Only the tooth had eventually to come out.

## CHAPTER V

### A HAND WITH KENNEDY JONES

**A**FTER paying my fare to London I had left standing to my credit exactly £80; not much considering the risks I ran—a raw provincial journalist invading Fleet Street; a great deal when the patience and trouble involved in saving £80 out of my earnings are taken into account.

To find suitable lodgings was no easy matter. The good rooms were too dear for my purse, and the bad ones too dreadful for my taste. I wanted to be near, but the closer I drew to the office, the more money they asked. In the end I landed myself in Southampton Row, in a large front bed-sitting-room whose windows allowed a fine view of the cosmopolitan life of Bloomsbury, with the German element, then, especially noticeable. For these amenities I paid 12s. 6d. a week, and thought myself comfortably settled, until the otherwise righteous landlady was driven to the unfortunate expedient of appointing fresh rooms with odd pieces of furniture from mine. At what point she would have considered exhaustion reached I never shall know, for when the process of demolition had stopped short only of the bedstead and a wholly indispensable article or two of crockery, I struck.

"Another week," I thought to myself, "and the bed may be gone. What then? Sleep on the floor?" No member of my family had yet been reduced so low. I must move. I moved, first bargaining with the new landlady that my bedroom was not to be regarded as a chessboard of movable pieces. If rooms for respectable single young men were dear, living was cheap. A good Strand restaurant sold me English steak and chipped potatoes for 1s. 1d.—tip 2d., accepted with a bow and hearty thanks; for morning rum and milk I paid 2d.; my bowler hat, silk lining included, cost 3s. 9d.—I had given up the "Bucky Taylor" hairy brand as too dear. I ran to three guineas for a tailored suit, and to another guinea for an extra pair of trousers; my boots accounted for a further 8s. 11d. Park seats were a penny.

Learning London was a fascinating hobby. I asked no better

amusement than to ride in the different-coloured horse 'buses and talk to the cheery red-faced drivers, who, at Christmas time, I remember, sported the Rothschild colours in recognition of the pheasants that the three generous brothers distributed among them. The quiet London squares, teeming at night with the ghosts of former inhabitants, made me thoughtful; sometimes, I actually shivered. Death stalked through, hidden in the shadows cast by the winking lights, covered up by the gloom of the dark, shuttered windows. So I was persuaded, being of an impressionable age when light spells life, and noise suggests cheerful movement. I know that I was glad to escape into the main shopping streets which had no room for ghosts or death.

If I found myself gazing up at the house in Curzon Street where, in 1881, Beaconsfield had died, I would feel sorry I had been born too late for my own eye to have taken him in, leaning, perchance, on the arm of the faithful Monty Corry. The walls told me nothing. A coffin had gone through the door, I mused, and with the coffin on the road to Hughenden must have stolen away all the mute evidences of romance—symbols and aroma of high adventure—leaving lifeless, expressionless brick to mock my restless curiosity.

I was fortunate and happy in my Editor, a man of most capable character and unvaried judgment, well-balanced and tolerant, just the one to sharpen the wits of a willing but immature journalist. I will not praise Walter John Evans more than to say that in him I found most of the qualities I desired in myself, especially courage, a rare attribute true of few journalists, especially in these anæmic times. In his conversation of which, when I was news-editor of the *Evening News* I had large, daily samples, I found a refreshing note of philosophic contentment and scorn. He was the smallest eater of any man of my acquaintance—lunch usually no more than an egg, a corner of toast and a cup of coffee, taken over a game of chess at Groom's chop-house in Fleet Street. He had surprisingly good health which he set down to his temperate meals, particularly at midday, when, as he argued and I have since learned to appreciate, a journalist's brain should not be drowsy with heavy feeding. Often to my intense discomfort if I got the whiff, he smoked the strongest shag, manufactured by the old-fashioned tobacco-shop in the Haymarket, the shop with the Georgian snuff jars in the window. This shag habit he shared with the literary-editor, Ariel Wright, who had come to us from Sheffield, and it was Wright's joke that this was the only reason he lasted so long. The Editor simply dare not be rid of the only

other person in the office to whom, in an emergency, he could apply for a pipe of shag.

Evans is the man to whom Lord Northcliffe referred when he publicly announced that no editor in the world earned so much.

Though both originally came from Birmingham, Evans was a complete contrast to Kennedy Jones. Whereas the one was quiet and conciliatory, the other was aggressive and vehement.

The interest of Kennedy Jones in the *Evening News* dated from the time he had persuaded Lord Northcliffe to buy it, and been given a share as a reward. In my day he kept a sharp eye on the paper's progress, which explained why I had reason to see him. Frankly I never knew how to take K. J. He would be friendly one moment and unpleasant the next. He had a specialised acidulated humour, which, more often than not, meant that he laughed at you rather than with you. His jokes were broad and akin to music-hall patter. Three times, with great gusto and terrific self-amusement, he told me the story of a Bishop for whose words of wisdom during a seven-course dinner the attendant guests anxiously awaited. The Bishop said nothing until two grilled kidneys were placed on his plate, when his eyes were seen to glisten and he was heard to exclaim, "Them's the jockeys for me!" The first time I heard the story I laughed. The second time I tittered; the third time I was bored, and K. J. was annoyed.

I never believed him as completely insulated against sentiment as he repeatedly insisted, nor did I take too seriously his remark that friendship should not count in business. I was aware he had a soft place in his heart for a provocative Scottish sub-editor, whom he was constantly saving from the new brooms sweeping through Carmelite House. It was entirely owing to his strong man pose that people, quite unfairly, gathered the impression of a harsh, unmellowed personality whom early adversity had unnecessarily hardened. Certainly, he had little patience with fools and too much liking for the company of successful men; had he reversed the parts—changed them round—it is justifiable to suppose that he might have learnt more of human nature and been kinder to the mistakes of others, not so competent as himself. An exceptionally efficient newspaperman, he lacked the imaginative qualities of Lord Northcliffe and the business and financial brain of Lord Rothermere, and as a taskmaster, with much less authority than either of the famous brothers, was rarely as indulgent.

Yet he had his admirable points. I have heard friends speak of him, both as a man and as a journalist, in language most glowing.

Though I was never a favourite of his, yet he took special pains to broaden my provincial brain, and give me a metropolitan and imperial outlook. That catch-phrase, "apply the glove-stretcher to your mind," was ever on the tip of his tongue, to keep me awake to the necessity of improvement. He imparted his lessons in a series of short, rasping sentences with a clipped American accent, and on one with a less sensitive hide the effect might have been terrifying.

He taught me to think of the modern newspaper in terms of a well-selected, well-balanced menu, with the various dishes arranged to afford the maximum of variety and contrast, the light dishes being duly proportioned to the heavy. On the other hand he held strongly to the view that in the most crowded paper it was a great mistake to cut your best story; the minor stories should be sacrificed first. When I did see him—which was infrequently—it was generally after he had been shaved in his room by the Whitefriars Street barber who was rumoured to have first brought him word that the *Evening News* was for sale—the start of his great prosperity. He was an inveterate cigarette-smoker, helping himself continuously to a supply kept in a box on his desk, and replenished from an old-established Fleet Street tobacconist, also understood to be a friend of his earlier days. I often treated him to a match, but never once got a cigarette in return, K. J. in that respect being so very different from Lord Northcliffe, who would ruefully advertise the fact that he kept me in cigars.

If Evans happened to be otherwise engaged, and Kennedy Jones had something on his mind, I, as news-editor, would be the selected victim. On one occasion I was confronted in his room with a blue-pencilled column in a rival "evening"; whereupon the following dialogue ensued:

KENNEDY JONES (*shrilly*): That's news! news! news!

MYSELF (*meekly*): Yes, it's quite a good story.

KENNEDY JONES (*louder*): I say that's news! news! news!

MYSELF (*more meekly*): Certainly a good story.

KENNEDY JONES (*crescendo*): If it's a good story why is it not in my paper? (pronounced pepper).

MYSELF (*sotto voce*): Because, Mr. Jones, it was in the *Evening News* yesterday.

*Tableau with everybody smiling.*

. . . . .

A colleague of mine suffered with the "blues." I said to him, "What on earth are you doing with yourself, old man?" He replied, "Falk, the dice are loaded against me. I have only three friends in the building."

"Who are they?" I inquired sympathetically.

With a shudder in his voice he whispered, "Alfred,<sup>1</sup> Harold<sup>2</sup> and K. J.<sup>3</sup>"

I said, "You *should* worry!"

I have a note of the following story, written down at the time, which, if not true, deserves to be:

An objectionable paragraph appeared in the *Evening News*. "Sack the man who wrote it," cried Lord Northcliffe over the telephone. "I have done," was the reply of the diplomatic Editor (W. J. Evans), "but he says he won't go."

"Won't go? What nonsense! I'll deal with him. What's his name?"

"Kennedy Jones, Chief!"

When I had left the *Evening News*, and in helping to found a weekly paper of which I was part owner had parted with what little money I had saved up, I met Kennedy Jones in Fleet Street, on his way to the Hotel Cecil. He said, "I hear you are not doing too well with your little paper, Falk." I nodded.

He put his hand on my shoulder and remarked, "Adversity will do you good," and went his way.

Meant kindly or otherwise, the truth of the prediction, in the light of subsequent events, can scarcely be disputed.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Northcliffe.    <sup>2</sup> Lord Rothermere.    <sup>3</sup> Kennedy Jones.

## CHAPTER VI

### PHILANTHROPIST—UNDER PRESSURE

THAT I lasted on the *Evening News* was a miracle. I started badly, and at the end of the first three weeks heard myself spoken of as "the Manchester dud." I had only myself to blame. The news-editor, George Nicholls, who afterwards won fame as the gentle gossipier, *Quex*, (how melancholy to reflect that his clever pen is silent and that he should already be numbered among the dead !) gave me stories to do which he thought would pan out well, and either I "muffed" them or there was less in them than we imagined—whatever the reason might be, at the end of the day I was poorly represented in the paper. Then luck veered round, just in the nick of time, for another such week might have finished me entirely. I changed duties with the 7 a.m. reporter, and every morning that blessed week I had a splash story to my credit. It was as though the stars in their courses were fighting for me. Sensational murders and dramatic robberies, all broke loose in the early hours of this incredible week, to the mutual profit of both the paper and the 7 a.m. reporter.

Naturally the result of having so many big stories, one after the other, in the *Evening News*, was heavily to turn the scales in my favour. I could consider my term of probation over. I had safely passed the test. My luck had not let me down. With thirty-four years of journalism behind me, more than ever I believe in luck. I am convinced that, in all but exceptional cases which prove the rule, a newspaper man requires fifty per cent luck if he is permanently to make good. Ability without luck may carry a man to a big job, but it will not keep him there. Nor, despite what a thousand wise men have said to the contrary, can any man in Fleet Street control his luck. Lord Northcliffe, with whom I often discussed this topic, was much of the same opinion and, incidentally, delivered himself of the two following reflections:—

1. *God has been good to me. How would I like to work in a machine-room?*
2. *No man gets everything he wants, and every man gets something he does not want.*



The colleague, whose early morning duty I had taken over with such pleasing results to myself, was stuffed with brains, but he had little luck. Hence he never achieved the success he deserved, nor did he live to enjoy the moderate prosperity that finally came to him. An older generation will recall the generous and versatile journalist I have in mind—Harry Leatherdale, who at the time of his death was on the staff of the *Daily Express*. He was not only an adroit newspaperman with every trick of the trade at his finger-ends, but the possessor of an extraordinary personality, marked by the most amiable qualities and the most surprising sentimental obsessions. I used to think the fellow all heart and little backbone, to such an extent did he allow his emotional leanings to carry him.

Leatherdale's appearance went well with his singular character. He was tall and thin, with lank black hair brushed across his forehead *à la* Lord Northcliffe; in his lean, cadaverous cheeks a red spot of colour suspiciously burnt—in reality, not a sign of health, but of undue mental excitement. When amused he laughed so heartily that his artificial teeth rattled like peas in a drum, or came right down, a predicament which, so far from causing him embarrassment, only made him cackle the more gleefully. Invariably he wore a tall silk hat, of ancient shape and aspect, which, with a merry wave of the arm, he boasted came from the finest hatter in Bond Street. I was prepared to believe him, had I not had occasion to look inside and spot, to my intense disappointment, the name of a less famous firm. To inquiring friends who quizzed him on his tall hat, he solemnly explained that he dare not be without it. At any moment Lord Northcliffe might send for him, and, if it were a case of being offered an editorship, where would he be without a silk hat in which to present himself? The only flaw in the argument was, that for any such purpose the Chief was just as likely to send for him, as he was to make me Editor of *The Times*. But it was as good an explanation as any, and droll into the bargain.

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Under his tall hat Leatherdale hid a trim square head crammed with tags of poetry, which, with glittering eye and fevered cheek, as he paced the courts at the back of Fleet Street, he spouted to an invisible audience. Fervent lines of Kipling made his eyes flash, and produced such an effect on his nerves that his hands involuntarily disappeared up his sleeves.

Here through the strong unhampered days,  
The tinkling silence thrills ;  
Or little, lost, Down churches praise  
The Lord who made the hills :

But here the Old Gods guard their round,  
And, in her secret heart,  
The heathen kingdom Wilfrid found  
Dreams, as she dwells, apart.

As I also liked bursting into catchy verse we had here a common bond of attachment, and in quiet places would recite together, among others, the following jingle borrowed from the Lord-knows-where !

I'm with you, fellow pauper,  
Let us share our scanty crust,  
Burst the bonds of fiscal torpor,  
Come where beer is sold on trust.

Let us free from *res angustæ*,  
Seek some fair Utopian mead,  
Where the throat is never dusty,  
And tobacco grows a weed.

Not wonderful poetry, but adequate for our purpose, which was to "let off steam."

What acquaintance I have with the submerged Tenth of Fleet Street is due to Leatherdale's recommendation. He knew every journalistic unfortunate, hard case, shipwreck or "bad-egg." No broken-down scribe, the worse for wear and mortal ailments, but called him "brother." Part of the embarrassment of my association with him was to have ascribed to me virtues which were peculiarly his own. He assured the waifs and strays of Fleet Street that I had a heart of gold, and to live up to his high praises of me meant diving deeper into my pockets than often I cared. I implored him to lower his opinion of my philanthropic instincts, saying that for me to give went sorely against the grain, but he had, or professed to have, a singular belief in my essential kindness. What is more he took a brotherly care that I "shelled out." When I complained overmuch, he assured me it was all in a good cause, and, presently, I would find the flotsam and jetsam we succoured, clothed in the raiment of a tender, romantic imagination. Each one, according to the idealised and invented biography which he passed off as history, was a heaven-sent genius, unlucky, like

many a great figure of the past, in being before his time—unappreciated and unsung. I have a record in one week of paying out 5s. 9d. in small sums to Fleet Street novelists, better than either Dickens or Wilkie Collins, whose hands I was privileged to shake.

Alarmed at the inroads into my pecuniary resources, I explained to Leatherdale that it was easy to be mistaken for a poet. It had happened to me in Chicago, but, somehow or other, the analogy missed fire. Perhaps he could not visualise a poet in Chicago; perhaps, in that famed centre of middle-west culture, he thought the term “poet” differently understood. What matters is that I got no change out of my appropriate rejoinder. In patience and in humility, and with the loss of weekly amounts which I could ill afford, I dree’d my weird, realising that Leatherdale was determined that I should be as poor as he was.

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Of one ill-requited genius whom I helped to various sixpences, in addition to a bowler hat in fair condition, a large size pocket handkerchief nearly new, and a magnifying glass to read small print bought at a Fleet Street pawnbroker’s, my soft-hearted friend had this affecting tale to tell:—The man had once been the pride of his fellows, skilled in every form of newspaper enterprise. He wrote poetry as easily as he wrote short stories; his name was synonymous with achievement. Suddenly he developed a passion for the beautiful wife of an ambassador, since when the scaffolding on which his life depended had wholly collapsed. Verses no more flowed from his pen. In the medium of short stories his once gracious muse was now dumb. Looking at the forlorn state of this once famous scribe I was prepared to believe anything, but it irritated me that, on the very point on which I sought enlightenment, Leatherdale should be purposely vague. Was the ambassador’s wife aware that his friend was in love with her? If so, what devilment had she exerted to reduce the passionate lover to such dire straits, including, incongruously enough, a distaste for work?

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The humble contributors to the press who were known as “flimsy” merchants, because of the thin carbon duplicates they sent round to the papers, looked up to Leatherdale, with his regular job on the *Evening News*, as to one of the elect of Fleet Street. I fancy that their admiring and respectful attentions gave him a certain amount of satisfaction, the feeling that, after all, he was a somebody. These “flimsy” merchants, whom the news

agencies with their more modern methods have gradually driven out of business, were a picturesque relic of old Grub Street days. When I was a reporter in Fleet Street you could count them by the hundred, all managing by various shifts and devices to pick up a bare living. I am confident that every one of these stylo-pushers—they used a stylo as the most effective combination with carbon duplicates—was personally known to Leatherdale, and called him "Harry." Frequently my friend would regale me with stories of their desperate exploits to "raise the wind," and whether or not saladed with gems from his own fertile imagination they made good hearing. He knew where they lived, how much on an average they earned, what they did when business was bad, their family connections on the Press, whether they saved anything, and, what was more interesting, why they had not advanced beyond their present, modest energies.

In the backwaters of Fleet Street, Fetter Lane and Leather Lane, where the light uneasily crept, he showed me strange dwellings which literary men of his circle called "home." I had the sensation of being introduced by some English Eugène Sue to the "Mysteries of London." He knew the secret benefactors who bought new outfits for the most luckless of his friends, and, in a burst of confidence which I still respect, he unfolded a rhymed method whereby a starving writer might always secure two pounds of sausages. Happily, never as yet have I been forced to avail myself of this sheet-anchor, but the details, written down in indelible pencil, are well in the forefront of my privately issued book, *Hints to Needy Journalists*.

Day after day, to an increasing number of unattached scribes, I found myself recommended by Leatherdale as a sure means of salvation in their hour of necessity, and though I fought hard against the attribution, it long survived, until in fact it was proved beyond all possible doubt to be a regrettable myth. In truth to have been a rope-line to all Leatherdale's friends would have meant a stouter heart and a stouter purse than at the best of times I possessed. However, some of the "flimsy" merchants were never likely to want help; they were men of means with grown-up children comfortably off. We heard tell of one who, socially ambitious, had married a police-sergeant's daughter; not uninteresting, for in those days there were few signs of any *entente* between Press and police.

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To learn what kind of man Leatherdale was, you had only to take him to the kiosk kept by the two charming ladies known as

the "Mall Milkmaids," to have him itching to pen a whole column about the romance underlying the survival of this little bit of old London life.

He saw a super-heated Lascar, who, having climbed the tall mast of a sailing-ship in the East India Docks, refused to come down ; he heard the murmur of soft vocables as in his madness the poor fellow apostrophised the skies ; and instantly my friend had sketched out a melting-piece which read just like a page torn from *Kim*. An unsentimental Scottish sub-editor, to whom he brought his "copy," bade him keep to the "fa-acts," and as he emptied the gold dust out of his radiant story, turning what was splendid fantasy to dull news, Leatherdale positively wept. Together we marched up and down Fleet Street, while he expatiated on the iniquity of massacring sincere work to suit a stereotyped mind. Thus he was able to rid his bosom of its perilous high explosive and exhaust his fit of anguish. It was not then a difficult matter to put him in good humour again. I remember reciting a tale of a journalistic friend, who, asked by a colleague for a removal order to a lunatic asylum, to be got by intercession with the Lord Mayor, indignantly replied that if there were any favours of the sort going, he wanted them for himself.

In the period under review many newspapers were disposed to give great prominence to crime, and in our different assignments Leatherdale and I would often come across energetic "free-lances" who specialised in murderers' last letters, pathetic interviews with relatives of notorious criminals, etc. While the system on which they went to work was always a mystery to me, in one notorious case, where a clear "corner" in a condemned man's epistles had been established, I did hear the explanation, which was that the enterprising "copy"-chaser was marrying into the family. To a large extent these traders in crime news have disappeared, along with more picturesque and likeable Fleet Street characters. While they existed they supplied a demand ; to-day not even the most vulgar newspaper would employ their services. Sordid journalism no longer attracts and no longer pays.

The journalistic anecdotage of the period, judging from my note-books, revelled in : (1) allusions to reporters' expense sheets, into which an apocryphal element was supposed to enter ; (2) silly mistakes made by papers that were not properly supervised ; (3) gross blunders perpetrated by naïve writers ; (4) exploits of desperate free-lances and hard-up scribes.

Incredible though it may sound, the most common error into

which, year after year, certain newspapers fell, was when at August-time they warned their readers to expect "the crack of the rifle" over the moors.

Of the laughable "bloomers" attributable to reporters, that of the Manchester note-taker fairly "takes the cake." Transcribing a Cathedral sermon based on "The Sermon of the Mount" he cut down the actual text, so that his copy read: "He (Jesus) added—."

More familiar was the oft-cited instance of the bright, young, descriptive wedding reporter, who wrote:—"With bells merrily pealing and with becoming ceremony, the marriage was duly consummated in the vestry." He was no worse than his colleague, who, with equal flair for colour, remarked, "So much of fashion was represented at the wedding of So-and-so that it is safe to say not a single *demi-mondaine* of note was absent."

My own taste in humour inclines to the effort in a more mournful vein of a Northamptonshire reporter, whose account of a funeral ended with these choice words, "As he was lowering the body into its last resting-place, the respected grave-digger suddenly collapsed and died, which event cast a gloom over the entire proceedings."

The "expenses jokes" included the one of the reporter, who, rushing madly along the Strand, was stopped by some of his friends and invited to say what the hurry was about. "Don't stop me, don't stop me," he cried excitedly, "I am having a cab!"

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The best free-lance yarns have the merit of being true. There was a seedy member of the fraternity, who so successfully faked an interview with Mr. Plowden, the witty Metropolitan Cadi, that he was told by his unsuspecting newspaper to go out and get another, *just as good*. Since to repeat his performance was far too dangerous, the "faker" had either to decline the order, or present himself to Mr. Plowden on the off-chance that the first "interview" had escaped his notice. He decided on the second course. To his intense discomfort, the magistrate began the conversation by asking whether he was the impudent and imaginative journalist who had concocted the previous interview. The journalist hung his abashed head in acknowledgment of guilt, only to hear Mr. Plowden say, "Look up, man, I do not propose to pitch into you; I only want you to put as much cleverness into this real interview as you put into the one you 'faked'!"

Enterprise of another description was attributed to a Midlands journalist, who, despairing of an immediate opening in his profession, undertook to represent a bedstead firm. Their explicit

instructions were, "Never forget you are in our employ to sell bedsteads." Having carefully thought out the problem, he went where he fancied the demand was constant. At the end of three months he had supplied the whole of the "red light" area with brand new bedsteads and was moving north.

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While Leatherdale remained on the *Evening News*, we patronised the back-room of the Lyons' café at the corner of Bouverie Street. Here we could write our copy in peace, or compare notes with other journalists on the same story. For the most part, I am bound to say, evening paper reporters were not very "chummy," preferring to play a lone hand rather than co-operate. Personally I did not mind. I was young and energetic, and in a journalistic sense could fight like a pole-cat. Thinking how tame I was to grow in the course of years, I feel not a little disheartened.

Besides the coffee, there was the attraction of the most beautiful girl our youthful eyes were privileged to feast upon. She sat in the pay-box by the door, a dazzling charmer whose face reminded one of Edna May in the *Belle of New York*—big black eyes, glossy dark ringlets, superb complexion, teeth like pearls, and a smile obviously borrowed from Paradise. I would not care to enumerate the coffees we drank merely for the purpose of paying our bill, and thus being at close range with the lovely creature, whose ravishing smile was her way of rewarding our transparent admiration.

It was too good to last. Some lucky man persuaded Gloriana of the pay-box to marry him. One morning we came to find her gone, and a less sensational beauty installed in her place. For a whole week the coffee did not taste nearly so fragrant. We took the gloom of the wintry mornings into our souls, and saw the place where we sat just as it was, no longer transformed by ardent fancy—an ordinary Lyons' café, one of several hundred.

I remember mentioning our "bereavement" to the founder of the business, old Sir Joseph Lyons, generally to be found at the Trocadero. He said all women were beautiful, but sometimes our eyesight was not so good. Old Joe was never allowed much time to himself. No sooner would he be settling down to a quiet half an hour, humming some Jewish melody of which one could catch the word, "Yerushalayim" (Jerusalem), before a reporter, thirsty for "copy," would be down on him. The motto of news-editors in those days was: on any slow afternoon, Joe Lyons is good for half a column. Either his reminiscences or his views on topics of the day provided "copy" as entertaining as the

papers demanded, and so to journalists he was as good as a free insurance endowment policy. People of my generation may recall the tiny cigars he smoked, less than a half-sized Corona, made from a mild leaf. He gave so many away, he explained, that had they been full size he would have been ruined.

To-day we rather incline to take Lyons' Popular Café in Piccadilly for granted, its novelty a thing of the past, but when first opened as the pioneer of the no-tipping movement, it created no end of excitement. The newspapers were chiefly interested in seeing how the crusade worked out, but the public were attracted by the lavish decorations, the brilliant lighting effects, and the opportunity of getting cheap meals under the best West End conditions.

Joe Lyons once told me that it was folly for restaurant-keepers to complain of rivals opening in the same street. Competition was all to the good; the more eating-places there were in a particular spot, the more inducement there was for people to go there. He instanced Soho and the Strand, with eating-places one on top of the other, all managing to pay.

After Joe Lyons I regarded General Booth as the newspaperman's most reliable source of "copy." His sayings, with their rugged Old Testament flavour and homely wisdom, went down well with the public which thought him a good sort, while the lower classes approved the primitive simplicity of his salvation methods. We noticed a gradual change in the technique of conversion. Little by little the old sensational shock tactics with the sinful were dropped; hysteria in storming Satan gave place to a more disciplined, more subtly appealing, propaganda. The wild martyred type began to be replaced by calm, well-balanced women, who in their Salvation Army bonnets looked comely and sensible. Men of education, not so demonstrative as the old bodyguard, joined forces with the movement, and, whereas we once regarded Salvationists a joke, now we found both profit and pleasure in talking to them. Whether General Booth thought journalists beyond redemption—permanent exiles from the mercy-seat—I do not know, but there went about the piquant story that, having invited a great gathering of Salvationists to kneel in prayer, he hastily added, "Gentlemen of the Press, of course, can consider themselves excluded."

The chief sub-editor of the *Evening News* was William Colley, a sharp-featured man as keen as he looked. In the twinkling of



an eye he would change the main story on the front page for something later and better. I have known him to complete at twelve minutes' notice a leaded column with headings already attached. A reporter had only to come in with a big story to inspire a demonstration of Colley's swift handling of news. He would skilfully extract the gist, and slip by slip, knocked off in large, sloping handwriting, prepare a new lead for the lino machines. Such quickness as he displayed I had never seen before ; nor for that matter have I seen it equalled since. On a later day I flattered myself that I could transform a reporter's copy into a quick splash, but rarely did I average Colley's speed.

When good Queen Victoria died the *Evening News* brought out a special edition. Despite the lateness of the hour, K. J. insisted on the issue of an extra edition to feature the death-bed scene. The necessary details were obtained over the telephone, and written up in the graphic and picturesque style that suited the occasion. Next morning one of the printers popped his head into the subs' room and remarked, "That was a fine story, Mr. Colley, you gave us of Queen Victoria's death-bed scene. Most pathetic, Mr. Colley ; enough to draw tears from a block of granite. I liked that affecting little bit you had about the wind whistling and moaning through the elm trees in Whippingham Church, nature's dirge, you might say, for the illustrious dead ; I repeat most affecting. Only, if you will allow me to say so, Mr. Colley, my home is near Whippingham Church, and *there are no elm trees.*" "Well, go and plant some," roared Colley. "Think of your paper !"

After reading in an important newspaper a moving account of the funeral of King Edward, Colley was left with the impression of having read it all before. But, as the matter had the signature of a famous writer attached to it, he found it hard to credit his suspicions. Yet the more he pondered over the phrases, the more he was convinced he was not mistaken. Suddenly he recalled where he had read it the first time, and on looking up the files at the British Museum realised his memory had not played him false. With the exception of a changed detail here and there, the King Edward story was identical with one describing the funeral of Sir Henry Irving, and in each case the signature was the same. To employ corresponding matter twice over, once for the funeral of a famous actor, and once for the funeral of a famous king, was economy of invention that demanded a good deal of explaining away.

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When I was a youth, newspapermen were quite casual in their approaches to such problems as provision for the future, working hours, and rest days. Bohemian characters formed a considerable proportion of the journalistic population, and the standardised products that were later to creep into the profession were as unknown as the overpaid amateurs, whose names are supposed to carry great weight with the reading public. No longer does one hear of 'cute messenger boys bringing page proofs of an evening paper to be corrected and adjusted on the friendly walls of an adjacent tavern, though, let me hasten to add, this unconventional handling was not reflected in any falling off in the standard of excellence.

If, judged by modern ideas, people in my world were a little queer, they were all of a piece with their adventures which were likewise queer. When they were preparing for press the first number of the *Daily Mail*, with the two Harmsworth brothers, Alfred and Harold, along with K. J., overlooking the proceedings, a quiet-looking man who stood at one of the tables was ordered to busy himself with a piece of "copy." He sat down and when he had finished "subbing" that item was given another to do, and so on until the end of the day, when he was told to go home and be sure to be on time the following day. When Friday came he saw other men going downstairs in a mass. On inquiring, he found they were about to draw their pay; so he followed them. He mentioned his name to old Lingard, who was helping the manager, John Cowley, only to be told that he was not down on the list. Noticing his crestfallen look, Lingard, always sympathetic, said to him, "How much is your money?" "Five guineas," whispered the man, as though afraid to mention too large an amount. "Five guineas," wrote down Lingard, and the money was paid. Only when ten years had elapsed and the man had left for another job, did the astonishing fact come to light that he had never been formally engaged by the *Daily Mail*. He had come into the office that first day hoping to be taken on, but before he could explain his presence had been pounced on and put to work.

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There was a clever reporter on the *Evening News*, who, having brought off a big coup, was told by Lord Northcliffe to find himself an office in Carmelite House and prepare the first number of a new magazine. At the end of a long holiday, the Chief, while making a tour of the building, came across the busy reporter sitting amid dummies piled ceiling high. "What on earth are you doing?" he promptly asked. "I have been getting out the

dummies of the new paper," was the reply. "What new paper?" retorted the Chief irritably, adding, when the circumstances were recalled to him, that all that was forgotten and done with. Taking a last look at the crestfallen editor seated in the centre of the piled-up numbers, he ended on this dramatic note, "You are like a toad built into a rock. Dig yourself out and be quick over it!"

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A prosperous writer on an evening paper, falling foul of the firm, was fired. As he sat on in the office, a colleague ventured to inquire what he was waiting for. "Oh," was the astonishing reply, "the boys have not yet been round with the 6.30!" *He wanted to save the cost of buying a paper outside.* It would have cost him a halfpenny.

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There were journalists who were celebrated for their ability in getting "paid off": men regarded as more valuable *off* than *on* the papers which engaged them. One of this bunch set up a record by being paid off three times in succession in the same building. He received three months' money from paper "A," and passed on to paper "B," which quickly preferred his absence to his presence, and paid him to go; then he was engaged by department "C," common to both papers, and was once more "fired," receiving cash in lieu of notice. By this time the firm had become alive to the fact that a non-stop notice-grabber was devouring their funds, and there was an end to his depredations.

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Other journalists held the reputation of being unsackable. There was a reporter with a stagey voice, who, when told to clear out, forthwith had a photograph taken of himself, his wife and eight children, all seated in a row. Armed with this photograph, which was fully twelve inches wide, allowing a little more than an inch for each person represented, he addressed himself to the proprietor. Standing the pictorial reproduction of himself and family in a prominent position, he ventured to inquire in the most funereal accents whether the embarrassed head of the business had the heart to plunge into abject poverty the whole of the human hive presented before his eyes. The man, of course, was promptly reinstated, but thereafter it was an implied order in the building that, before any additions to the staff were made, the size of the family should first be discreetly ascertained. To

remain solvent the firm could not carry more than one "unsinkable."

While I was enlarging my knowledge of journalists, I was increasing my acquaintanceship with landladies, one of whom smilingly assured me that she preferred "young gentlemen from the shires." Eventually I drifted to Maida Vale, where as a guest in a high-class boarding house I paid 25s. a week for lodging and partial board, sleeping in a top attic usually reserved for the maid-of-all-work. After a fortnight's absence in the country on newspaper business, during which time I paid my bill as usual, I returned to find salmon, haddock and cod being handed round as one of the dinner dishes. When my turn came the waiter tipped his eye in the direction of the cod, but in a loud voice I said: "a little salmon, please." At the end of the meal, the proprietress who had been fuming and fussing at a side table, asked me whether I was aware that choice fish, such as salmon which cost four shillings a pound, was reserved for "star" boarders who paid more per day than I paid per week. I expressed surprise at the information, but pointed out that I had been away a full fortnight without eating either dear or cheap fish.

The good lady stuck to her point. Nobody in her house who paid as little as 25s. a week could eat salmon. I pleaded that she made no allowance for human nature. What sensible man, confronted with salmon, haddock, and cod, would choose other than salmon? For a Maida Vale matron she had surprisingly little humour, and my remark fell on cold ears. So I left, finding a fresh home in Cricklewood where I might have salmon and Dover soles, and where poverty was not considered an impregnable barrier to discriminating taste. By a curious coincidence two spinster ladies were again to be my salvation. Unlike their predecessors in Flixton they were comfortably off, and the money I paid was not an important consideration. As a measure of safety they thought a man in the house advisable. Poor deluded souls, to imagine a journalist with his erratic habits any protection! Never could I have wished for greater kindness. A magnificent front bedroom and the finest food—all for the small sum of 35s. a week. Where should I find the like to-day?

## CHAPTER VII

### STRANGE INTERLUDE, AT NICE

FOR my one chance of meeting the great Moberly Bell, the famous manager of *The Times*, I had to thank *The Times*' "Book Club" war, long ancient history and nowadays of little interest to recall. My youthful manner quickly produced me an interview. The great man was excited, but agreeable and quite fatherly. His face all the time I was with him beamed encouragement; his eyes sparkled with mischief. "What a nice chap!" I thought to myself. Yet rumour had spoken of him as most awkward to tackle. To me, with his great leonine head and beaklike nose, he did not in the least look like a journalist. Had I not known, I should have taken him for a diplomat or a Harley Street specialist.

Visiting Nice some weeks before the real season began, I secured rooms at one of the leading hotels, the reduced end-of-the-year terms being suitable to my lean purse. Here I came into contact with a Frenchman who was to leave a lasting impression on my memory. He was, to begin with, imposing in appearance, at least 6 feet 3 inches tall; then he had great, broad shoulders and facial features as clear-cut as Cæsar's, set off by a massive black beard trimmed in the *Henri Quatre* style, which in thoughtful moments he stroked with elegant fingers. But even more remarkable than his presence was his commanding behaviour. Two beautiful women accompanied him at meals. Their relationship to him I was never allowed to guess, for I was too polite to be indiscreetly curious, and in any case the attitude of the hotel attendants did not invite questions.

Whatever the bond might be, it was a source of happiness to all three. They laughed and joked and were altogether an enviable party; yet to me, discreetly looking on from my side of the room, the man seemed to tolerate rather than to make conversation. If he desired to read, he had only to raise a warning forefinger and utter the word, "attention!" for all prattle to cease, the scene in this respect being suggestive of a kindergarten, hushed by the authoritative voice of the headmistress. Thereafter the two lovely ladies remained as quiet as well-bred children. When their

feminine instinct for chatter broke loose again, that warning forefinger would be raised once more, coupled with the incredible call to silence of that magic word, "attention ! "

Result : instantaneous submission. Ah ! he was magnificent, that French Pasha, magnificent and unique in his role of " The man who must be obeyed ! " To sit at a convenient distance and watch the delectable comedy being enacted was far better entertainment for my journalistic soul than basking in the sun, or observing the gaily attired crowd which sought health and appetite along the promenade.

All three were superb creatures, the man no less than the women, but of the trio, he with his sovereign air and commanding manner was most striking. I repeat : I have never forgotten him. I think of him as a reincarnated being from a golden age when unemancipated woman looked up to her protective mate in fear and adoration combined. It may be that they were sisters and brother, or wife, husband and sister-in-law—which I do not know, for I never made certain of the facts. Whatever the relationship may have been, it certainly made for contentment. From the happiness that shone in their faces, the women were clearly desirous that the man's will should be dominant.

The doctor in Vicki Baum's remarkable novel, *Grand Hotel*, unceasingly complains that people come and go and nothing happens. That, of course, is mere literary artifice to emphasise the powerful drama taking place within the hotel walls. My experience has always been that hotels are the one place where you can be certain life will never remain still, or be void of suggestive incident. I remember when I was a boy seeing a newly-wedded couple drive up to the Queen's Hotel, Manchester, renowned for its fashionable and exclusive *clientèle*. The bride's face had printed on it the unmistakable look of innocence. She might just have come out of the convent, so little was normal worldly shrewdness mirrored in that adorable, girlish expression. As she entered the hotel she clung tenderly to the bridegroom's arm—he was little more than a boy himself. Standing in the hall of the hotel, the two made the most delightful and sympathetic picture imaginable.

In whatever circumstances in after-life I st  
their faces, I felt certain, would remain fa  
rolled on ; I was forty-two and life in my  
far from romantic. One dullish evening,  
theatre, my eye caught sight of a huge Da

of one of the big hotels, from which a dainty lady of fifty was stepping out. What particularly arrested my attention was the careful way she was assisted by a handsome man, whose iron-grey hair and moustache at once marked him out as being of the same age. I thought their faces reminiscent ; then, as with indefinable grace and affection, she took his arm the little distance to the hotel doors and confidently looked up into his face, I suddenly remembered where I had seen them before. They were my Queen's Hotel honeymooning couple of thirty years back. That they still remained lovers made my ageing heart jump with joy. I swear that the woman's beautiful face carried the same innocent expression that had first taken my imagination captive.

The theatre piece bored me. It was one of the modern, sophisticated comedies, all wise-cracks and *risqué* situations. Perhaps I should not have blamed the play ; I was under the influence of the emotions set up in me by this chance meeting, which, while recalling my boyhood days, seemed to prove that in fortunate cases love could be, and often was, as undying as the eternal stars.

During the hot summer months I usually went for dinner to a country hotel, whose guests included a famous jockey. As jockeys require to be careful of their weight, the friends of this particular rider were none too pleased to notice that the fine farm-house diet provided was causing him to grow fat. In great consternation they scurried round for an infallible specific for keeping him thin—a certain type of fruit. Unfortunately the season had just ended and none was to be had locally. Away up to London sped the alarmed friends, and not until a supply had been secured did they return. Presently everybody breathed freely to see the jockey's lines become normal again. I will not tantalize the reader by withholding the name of the fruit. It was black currants, freshly stewed, an unfailing preventive, I was assured, of obesity.

My favourite place for lunch was the Wellington Tavern in Fleet Street, whose proprietor, a kindly Italian, had a most pleasant voice. Here I had, as neighbour, G. K. Chesterton, his agreeable and not inconsiderable proportions draped by an enormous ulster cloak. Usually with a bottle of Burgundy or Chianti in front of him, he sat confiding his merry inventions to a large-size notebook. As he wrote, he rocked with laughter so infectious that I might have been pardoned for joining in. Sometimes watching his rounded form expand with these lusty guffaws, I feared for the contents of the table. The writing done and the bill paid, the

tremendous fellow retired into the capacious folds of his ulster, and thus protected against the weather emerged into Fleet Street, where his further progress was marked by a swinging cane whose pendulous movement might have been conducting some unseen orchestra.

Another day would find Hilaire Belloc writing in that self-same seat. Being entirely absorbed in his mental processes, he did little to attract attention to himself.

I recall mornings when the whole *corps d'élite* of letters could be met in the small universe lying between Bouverie Street and Sloane Square. Starting with Barrie, whose unlit pipe, shabby felt hat, and sixpenny stick dragged carelessly behind him, suggested complete indifference to popular opinion, you had not far to go before you stumbled into Bernard Shaw, the picture of health in a brown ulster and saucy Trilby hat, perhaps escorting through the Embankment Gardens Israel Zangwill, his thin legs and turned-in toes strangely out of keeping with his great professor-like head. Then a man with thick hair, head shaped like Alfred Harmsworth, and poetical side-whiskers plus moustache to give his face further variety, would pass. You looked up to rub shoulders with Andrew Lang, perhaps to remember his invariable jesting remark to friends who sought his address: "you walk along Marloes Road and when you drop dead *there* is my house!"

Arnold Bennett, thrusting a stiffish neck into the select air of Sloane Street, ever blessed with fresh glimpses of his latest new suit; H. G. Wells, radiating prosperity and happiness, met somewhere near the Reform Club; George Moore sauntering through Ebury Street, still springy on his feet, sometimes with a sympathetic and gratified listener, sometimes alone—all three literary giants, I say, I have come across in the course of an hour, without, I might add, being at all impressed, for I am little of a hero-worshipper.

On meeting George Moore I would murmur to myself, "Once he exchanged sparkling wit with the great French artists; now he is worried by the behaviour of dogs, big as calves, who are careless in their treatment of the pavement near his doorstep."

I was never fated to have much luck with George Moore. On none of the occasions on which I saw him did he impart to me any of the memorable sayings which fell to the share of more ingenious interviewers. Beyond the familiar remark that Thomas



Hardy could never write, I have a record of few of George Moore's sayings worth commemorating.

The only way to draw George Moore—at least this was my experience—was heartily to agree with him; but some of his remarks were so preposterously absurd that out of self-respect I was compelled to challenge them. If he were showing me his pictures he would dwell on the beauties of Mark Fisher, whom he regarded as a great genius. Did I venture to disagree with him, saying that I thought Mark Fisher's work competent and attractive but no more, instantly the old gentleman would be down on me like a ton of bricks, his manner seeming to say: "how dare you have opinions of your own?" Again, were I to attempt to switch the conversation on to something that interested me, with astonishing alertness the good man would pull me back to a topic of his own choosing. If I mentioned Sickert, remarking that I was a great admirer of his work, Moore would be silent, then proceed to ask me some quite irrelevant question, such as how I liked popular journalism, and I knew that would be all of Sickert for that morning. From an incautious remark, uttered in a moment of irritation which I am sure he regretted, I gathered that he was none too pleased with Sickert's wonderful portrait of himself in the Tate Gallery, a portrait which had caught his solemn expression in the most miraculous fashion, and did not in the least idealise him.

I repeat, I was unlucky with George Moore. Probably my manner was not sufficiently respectful or admiring, but as I usually saw him with the idea of commissioning articles, I did not feel like going cap in hand. For all his Flaubert-like devotion to style he was extremely business-like, and insisted on being paid £40 an article. When I hinted that £25 was ample he snorted. He had been told to charge £40, and £40 he must have. If I were prepared to discuss "The Brook Kerith" his manner became extremely cordial. He would be ready to give up perhaps an hour of his valuable time to discussing such an erudite point as the exact French equivalent of the title.

Two lengthy epistles devoted to this one point followed a visit of mine where it had monopolised the conversation. I have said I tried to draw him on regarding Sickert. His reluctance to discuss his old friend I could only put down to petulance. There is no doubt that Sickert's superior wit, coupled with a refusal to take seriously anything that Moore wrote or said about him, gravely annoyed the sage of Ebury Street, who liked nothing better than an open row which would interest the public. If he ventured to show Sickert a proof containing allusions to him,

possibly not remarkable for their literal truth, the painter, after the most cursory glance, would hand it back as though it were a matter of no account. That left the touchy Irishman inwardly boiling. He could stand hatred, virulent criticism, bitter sarcasm, but indifference to anything he had written made him mad.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WORDS OVER SWINBURNE'S ADAH

**I**N such odd hours as I could call my own, one of my amusements in London was to rummage in second-hand bookshops for bargains. I had had considerable practice, for when Holywell Street, the Strand book bazaar, was in existence, I spent innumerable hours picking up cheap miscellaneous literature there. Occasionally a treasure in the shape of a first edition that subsequently turned valuable would reward my patience and vigilance. Had I been endowed then with any prescience, I should have bought for shillings books worth pounds to-day. They were right under my very nose, asking to be picked up, but I did not know. Like a greenhorn I usually bought the common or garden varieties, leaving rare orchids for the connoisseur. Yet even the biggest fool may learn from experience, and once having settled in London I started to learn something of the real values of books.

A favourite rendezvous for my "digging" operations, because of its proximity to Fleet Street, was the New Oxford Street shop of Charles J. Sawyer, who in those days had no reason to suppose that he would end up in Grafton Street, next door to the great Quaritch. An ever-popular feature of Sawyer's attractive shop was a 6d. rubbish box, which was supposed to repay careful search. Explore this soil patiently, and a little gold sand might be found at the bottom of the pan. My own efforts were rewarded with the first edition of a book called *Secret History of the Court of England*, published in 1836. On the paper binding was printed this flowery legend, "£1000 has been refused for this book," or words to that effect. When I drew Sawyer's attention to the "find," he explained that the book had dropped by accident into the rubbish box, but that it was nonsense to imagine its value was anything like that suggested on the cover. Perhaps £2 or £3 at the utmost represented its worth. I made a little newspaper story out of the incident, and at the same time awakened in myself a strong desire for collecting first editions and curios. So powerful an influence did the newly-aroused hobby exert on me that I had serious thoughts of abandoning journalism for the

second-hand book business. It would have been a foolish step, for I did know something about journalism, while the book trade was "double Dutch" to me.

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With Sawyer's help I assembled a fine collection of Swinburne rarities, but when the poet died my interest in them waned, and I arranged for their disposal at Sotheby's. In its announcement of the forthcoming sale *The Times* specified some of the outstanding items. These, catching the watchful eye of Watts-Dunton, long the friend and protector of Swinburne, caused him to jump precipitately into print with a letter which no future biographer of the poet can afford to ignore. Ostensibly the intention of the author of *Aylwin* was to repudiate the attribution to Swinburne of one of the lots, a flysheet containing the two stanzas of the poem, *Dolorida*, which people rightly persisted in saying had been written by the identical pen which fashioned *Atalanta in Calydon*. But to me it was clear that the real object of Watts-Dunton was to deal a body-blow at the undying Adah Menken legend, which carried down the years the murmur of her Bohemian passages with Swinburne. The mention in my collection of *Dolorida*, together with an even more aggravating Adah Menken curiosity, gave him a first-class opportunity for venting his spleen against the "Dolores" of his friend's wild and passionate manhood.

*Dolorida* was first announced in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of the winter of 1883 as being contributed by Mr. A. C. Swinburne to a Christmas annual, entitled *Walnuts and Wine*. The poet disavowed all knowledge of the annual, the editor, the contributor and the contribution; in other words, whoever wrote *Dolorida* was somebody entirely different.

Poets may have their own code and sense of honour; even so, it is hard to explain away Swinburne's denial. Not only had he taken the eight lines from his unpublished novel, *Lesbia Brandon*, but he had transferred them in his own unmistakable autograph to the album in which Adah Menken, the famous "Mazeppa" of the sixties over whom our great-grandfathers raved, kept remembrance tokens of her friends. Fifteen years previously he had been proud to number the actress, famed for her wonderful figure and her racy tongue, among his dearest companions, to say of her, whom he called by her reputed name of "Dolores," that she was most lovable as friend and mistress. Fifteen years ought not to have made all that difference—to have found the erstwhile lover ready to repudiate the very lines he had written in her little

book to gratify a passing whim on her part. But Swinburne was never what one might call "a tried and trusty friend," as witness his ultimate coldness to Sir Edmund Gosse.

Here are the eight lines over which, to be quite blunt, Swinburne lied :

" Combien de temps, dis, la belle,<sup>1</sup>  
Dis, veux-tu m'être fidèle ?—  
Pour une nuit, pour un jour,  
Mon amour.

L'amour nous flatte et nous touche  
Du doigt, de l'œil, de la bouche,  
Pour un jour, pour une nuit,  
Et s'en fuit"—

George Moore's admirable translation does full justice to the original :

" How long canst thou be  
Faithful ? " she said to me.  
" For one night and a day  
Mistress, I may."

Love flatters us with sighs,  
And kisses on mouth and eyes,  
For a day and a night  
Before his flight.

Watts-Dunton in his letter to *The Times* repeated, word for word, Swinburne's original repudiation, and then passed on to my other provocative Adah Menken titbit, the main reason for his anger. This was a copy of Adah Menken's poems, *Infelicia*, with the inscription :—

" To John Camden Hotten [*his publisher*], A. C. Swinburne.  
' *Lo, this is she that was the world's delight !* ' "

" It is very likely true," said Watts-Dunton, with a bitter emphasis I had not expected from so mild-mannered a man, " that Mr. Swinburne inscribed the words, ' *Lo, this is she that was the world's delight.* ' ' But that was his fun,' to use Charles Lamb's saying about Coleridge's sermons. For years the Adah Menken matter has at intervals been brought up. Some few years ago, before his death, I asked Mr. Swinburne what he thought of ' *Infelicia.* ' His answer was : ' Can you ask me ? A

<sup>1</sup> The two stanzas are in the manuscript and in the unique proof of *Lesbia Brandon* owned by Mr. T. J. Wise.

girl may be admired as "Mazeppa" without being admired as a poet. I think it the greatest rot ever published.' How Charles Dickens ever came to accept the dedication of it, is, of course, past all comprehension."

I replied at length to a number of the points raised by Watts-Dunton in his letter. While supporting the authenticity of Swinburne's authorship of *Dolorida*, I reminded his old friend that the poet was most partial to the habit of writing little things in the albums of people he liked, and I recalled that when Tennyson was asked about an autograph poem, inscribed in the album of a friend of his earlier years, he wrote back that he had quite forgotten whether he had written it or not.

But Swinburne being dead just a matter of a few weeks, I had no wish to lacerate Watts-Dunton's feelings further by any pointed, retaliatory references to Adah Menken, of whom the poet had stood in such awe that once, when he had scratched his face, he had not the heart to present himself before her. There is not the slightest doubt that for some space of time she was Swinburne's constant intimate; nor is it any more open to doubt that *Infelicia*, which years afterwards he was to describe to Watts-Dunton as "rot," contains numerous lines which he revised and improved, even if he did no more. Tremendous efforts have been made to prove that Swinburne could not have had a hand in them, because they were written long before he and the glamorous Adah met. In some form or other most of the poems were composed before Swinburne came upon the scene, but that all the lines were the same as those which appeared in *Infelicia* I hesitate to believe.

A determined woman who generally achieved her ends, Adah Menken, after her triumph as *Mazeppa* at Astley's theatre in 1864, concentrated on the task of having her poems from the American papers revised by some great English literary figure. Her letters suggest that Charles Dickens at first was willing to perform that service, but that later her choice fell upon two genuine poets, Rossetti and Swinburne, both her friends. However, largely owing to representations by John Thomson, the *Weekly Dispatch* theatrical critic, who was madly in love with her, Swinburne, for whom he acted as a sort of secretary, undertook the job.

Who was Adah Menken? She was essentially a woman of mystery, her life full of riddles with which I have dealt at length in a book published under the title of *The Naked Lady*. It is now taken for granted that she was born a Jewess. Certainly she died professing this faith, and to the end retained the name of

her Jewish husband, Alexander Isaac Menken, who taught her singing. In her short life of thirty-three years she had four known husbands, among them being Heenan, the pugilist, who figured in the famous *mill* with Tom Sayers at Farningham. His gifts did not extend to chivalry, for he repudiated his marriage with the lady and left her to fend for herself. Afterwards, when she had become famous, he sought a reconciliation, but this did not last for more than a few weeks.

Adah Menken tried various roads to fame and fortune—she wrote poetry, she edited papers, she sang, she danced and she gave lectures in the manner, if not with the power, of Charles Dickens. But she did nothing better than enact the part of “Mazeppa,” when tied to the back of a horse that mounted a rocky stairway, she exhibited to an admiring and discerning public the finest and most seductive curves of the sixties. Even the modern film stage, with its dazzling galaxy of generously revealed beauty, would not have disdained her lovely proportions. In England she made conquest not only of the theatre-loving public, but of the great wits and literary lights. Her success in Paris was on all fours with her London triumphs, though she rather upset expectations by becoming the last mistress of the ageing but still gallant Alexandre Dumas *père*.

On returning to England she resumed her friendship with Rossetti, and in the spirit of devilment and for a wager agreed to pass the night in Swinburne’s lodgings. She won her bet, but declined to accept the money. That was the beginning of an association which caused no end of commotion, particularly as copies of a mild and innocuous photograph, showing poet and actress together in friendly pose, reached the eyes of Swinburne’s aristocratic relatives, who professed themselves gravely shocked.

The story goes that when Adah Menken ventured to discuss poetry with Swinburne, he gravely remarked, “Darling, a woman who has such beautiful legs need not discuss poetry.” Few will be prepared to say that he was wrong.

It would be thought that this exchange of letters in *The Times* between Watts-Dunton and myself was certain to produce excited bidding for the little collection which had caused all the rumpus. Nothing of the kind. Good but not sensational prices were realised, for already the enthusiasm of collectors for Swinburne rarities was beginning to wane.

I should add that my copy of the "Poems and Ballads" had been autographed for me by Swinburne at the direct request of Watts-Dunton. On the few occasions I saw him, his young, charming and accomplished wife was present, and no doubt this helped to make him agreeable.

He struck me at the time as being much misunderstood, and certainly most unjustly abused. Admittedly it was difficult to break through the barrier he had erected around the poet; admittedly it was annoying to have to set down as utterly fruitless several long conversations with him, all designed to bring me into contact with Swinburne. But in fairness one had to confess the explanation offered was not inadequate. You were told that Swinburne being so deaf, it was but elementary kindness to spare him the ordeal of meeting strangers. Never for a moment did I believe, what bitter-minded critics of *The Pines' ménage* urged, that Watts-Dunton was jealous of others meeting his poet-friend. Had I felt sorely tempted, I could easily have found ways and means of making myself known to Swinburne, for frequently I met him capering across the Heath in eager anticipation of the glass of beer which was his daily delight. Nobody having once encountered his curious jerky step could ever mistake Swinburne for someone else.

So tired was Watts-Dunton of answering endless questions about his friend, that it was an incredible relief when the discussion turned on himself. I was human enough to appreciate that point, and as a sign of gratitude he gave me an inscribed copy of *Aylwin*. Not to be too much in his debt, I returned him an unsigned copy. Watts-Dunton may have been a fussy little man, conceited if you like, but he had his fine qualities, and that he endured uncomplainingly and for so long the boredom of living with a dried-up, deaf poet testified to the strength of his character, to the depth of his affection, and to his Job-like patience. Try sharing a home with a deaf literary man, year in, and year out; then you will be able to measure the stock of good temper necessary to keep the relationship from dwindling into cynical animosity.

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Passing through Reading, I caught sight of an antique dealer's window which advertised for sale relics of Grimaldi, the famous clown. I induced my book-seller friend, Sawyer, to buy one lot, while I invested in another. I would have been all the more excited by my purchase had I known, what I was only to learn years afterwards, that from a branch of the same famous stock



which had given Monaco its hereditary Prince and Laughter its beloved monarch, had sprung my friend, G. H. Grimaldi, the *Daily Mail* publicity expert. The moment he heard of my purchase, Grimaldi hastened to throw in his own personal relics of the celebrated clown. I had not the heart to tell him the truth, that when my house was in imminent danger of becoming a miniature South Kensington Museum, and to permit of some of the rooms being used for ordinary living purposes, I disposed of a good many curios, including the Grimaldi effects bought in Reading. His contribution, of course, I keep intact against the day when he demands its return; meanwhile hoping that the journalist who sold the dead clown's relics may, by open and contrite confession of his fault, have by then placated the Jester's kinsman, the living Grimaldi.

When I had been on the *Evening News* about a couple of years there came on to the staff a young man, not quite twenty-one, who seemed to speak with ease every language under the sun. The same power that he had as a linguist, he displayed as a reporter. In a way quite different from other clever journalists he succeeded with the most difficult stories. He went down destroyed coal mines, or he interviewed suffragettes in prison, to mention only two of his *coups*. He was a great find. His name fully spelt out could not easily be forgotten. It was Albert Pierre De Courville. As he was supposed to be descended from an ennobled continental family we sometimes prefaced his imposing name with the title of "Count," but De Courville only smiled or muttered things in French, Spanish, Italian, or Portuguese which did not give the staff a ghost of a chance of repartee. Not much younger than myself, lively and amusing, he tended to gravitate in my direction, and despite marked temperamental divergencies, we were often together. By reason of his nimble Latin brain he soon found the road to success. Good reporter as he was, earning as much as £20 a week on space, he yet saw more possibilities in the theatre; certainly more money. When that short-lived game, Diabolo, was all the rage he went over to Paris and engaged the French child champion, François Meunier, to perform at various London music-halls, a profitable piece of enterprise which I helped to finance. Such was the start of his association with popular entertainment. Then our ways parted. He joined up with Sir Edward Moss, and, through successful revue production at the London Hippodrome, passed on to an earning capacity which rumour placed as high as £40,000 a year.

I left the *Evening News*, but remained in journalism, and while on all sides De Courville's prosperity was openly proclaimed, my

own fortunes remained sadly in eclipse. I was much poorer than when we had been fellow-reporters.

The expenses bills of De Courville used to remind me of washing lists, so minutely set forth were the tiniest items. He would tabulate all his different 'bus fares separately, while I and others for the sake of brevity would bracket a day's rides together. I remember, for when I was news-editor of the *Evening News* I had to counter-sign all the reporters' bills.

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Readers of the *Evening News* will always save a warm corner in their hearts for the delightful series, "Talks of Old London," which were contributed by an accomplished journalist, William McCartney. They arose out of a suggestion of mine that he should interview some of the oldest London 'bus drivers. The racy reminiscences of these rugged and witty characters, as brought out by McCartney, proved so fresh and entertaining a feature that we simply dare not contemplate stopping them. In order to keep the feature going, its scope was extended to include all manner of London ancients, not merely 'bus drivers as originally intended. Had there been any possibility of the supply of patriarchs lasting, there is no doubt that the talks would still be continuing, for nothing interests the Londoner more than to read of the old days when London had not begun to be modernised, and to some minds spoilt.

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Now for a most curious experience which I do not pretend to explain, but merely leave to the reader's judgment and imagination. I was sitting in the partitioned cubicle in the sub-editors' room where I did my work, when the telephone bell rang. "Someone calling himself 'God' wishes to see you," said the operator. I queried the name, but was assured I had heard rightly the first time. Thinking I was at the mercy of some practical joker, yet wanting to satisfy my curiosity, I said, "All right, put him through." A piercing voice at the other end of the wire exclaimed, slowly and distinctly, as if he were next to me, "This is God speaking." "Where are you speaking from?" I lamely asked, being totally unused to conversations with people professing to be the Deity. "From Croydon," was the reply. That did not sound convincing. My instinct was to shut down the receiver. Instead I turned to a colleague and sought his advice. He could only think of ringing up Scotland Yard, the Secret Service branch for preference, which I thought tommy-rot. As my mysterious

caller was growing impatient, I thought the best thing to do was to invite him to the office. His answer was, "Expect me at the front entrance in five minutes," which gave me quite a shock, Croydon being at least ten miles off. Still thinking I had to do either with a saucy joker or with a crank, I went gingerly downstairs, and without telling anybody my business stood on the bottom step of the front door. Presently there came clattering up the street a magnificent white charger, on whose back sat a tall, bare-headed man, horse and rider suggestive for all the world of the poem, "Excelsior." At the astonishing apparition there crossed my mind, not irreverently I vouch, the thought, "Is this a vision met on the road to Damascus? or, miraculously, have the centuries folded back to the portents of Domrémy?"

Up to the door of Carmelite House came the mysterious rider. For a fraction of a second I imagined he was about to leap the stairs, and prepared hastily to fly, but then, seeing me, he suddenly reined in his charger, and for the fraction of a minute gave forth a piercing look that froze the marrow in my bones. Finally, while I was nervously wondering what would come next, he put spurs to his horse and went flying through the air, without so much as a single word by way of explanation. Speechless with amazement I watched the leaping hoofs of the great horse carry its rider swiftly on to the Embankment. As fast as I could I ran after, with what hope—heaven knows! The speed was utterly beyond me. Horse and rider were soon out of sight. Thereafter, not a word or a sign, only silence, baffling and complete.

Every generation has its humorous writer. Twenty-four years ago taste favoured Frank Richardson, who specialised in droll essays on the viciousness of beards and hirsute adornments generally, denouncing them all as insanitary microbe traps. No newspaper symposium was considered good that had not in it a contribution from Frank Richardson. When a fierce controversy raged round the mention that whiskers were likely to become fashionable again, an indignant reader wrote asking his favourite paper: "what could be more absurd than a pair of side-whiskers?"

He was answered by Frank Richardson who wrote: "one side-whisker, please!"

As I grew older, in order to prevent myself developing into a chronic victim of "spongers," I began to exercise both ingenuity and a discouraging manner. A "hard luck" friend wanted me to let him £10. With the money he could make a quick profit. "How much profit?" I inquired. "Four pounds," was the

reply. "Well," said I quickly, "here's your profit," handing him £4. He was not at all pleased, but I saved six pounds.

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I was fair game for children whom I could never suspect of "double-dealing." At the corner of Fetter Lane a little girl, holding up a regrettably small apple, asked if I would cut it into four pieces. "Why?" Well, there were her two brothers and "sissy" to have a share. "But there will be so little for each of you," I pointed out. "Would you like me to buy you three more apples?" A shy smile betokened assent. I bought the apples and handed them over. Just as I was going away it occurred to me to ask the little girl if she had ever been in the same dilemma before with a small apple. That child could not lie. "Yes, sir," was her reply, "the day before yesterday." "And what happened?" "A gentleman gave me 2d. with which to buy three others."

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An *Evening News* reporter, suddenly falling into affluence, required a large diamond ring for his finger as a sign of prosperity. I introduced him to a reputable jeweller, who to convince him he was getting value took him on to the roof. In a better light my colleague might see for himself that the stone offered was a pure blue-white. To inspire further confidence I was persuaded to accompany him on the roof, and the Ironical Fates must certainly have smiled to see the precious pair of us debating with an expert jeweller whether there were feather marks in the diamond. Being totally unused to such altitudes, my only reward for such zeal was to catch a severe cold. I sometimes wonder if my old colleague still has his diamond ring?

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When hard pressed for time I sent out for my meals, the instruction to the copy-boy being, "be sure to mention my name and bring clean plates." The dishes arrived so smudgy one afternoon that I had no alternative but to send them back. The manager of the café refused to apologise. It was not his fault. I was on the *clean* list, and the copy-boy had omitted to say the plates were for me.

## CHAPTER IX

### HISS THAT BROUGHT DEATH

**A**FTER Manchester's comparatively peaceful ways, London evening-paper journalism proved tremendously harassing, the hours long and the opportunities for rest often few and far between. Not only was the competition infinitely more nerve-racking than anything to which I had been accustomed, but the "crack" reporters on most papers, as I have already hinted, were disinclined to show one another the slightest mercy. Having an aggressive temperament I was not allowed to be any exception to the rule. The others did their level best to beat me, and being human I sought to repay them in kind.

It is not for me to say who got the worst of the deal, but had my health been sounder I might have come off even more advantageously. I was always suffering from some ache or pain—nothing very serious, but at the same time sufficiently troublesome to be an appreciable handicap.

Thirty years ago reporters were expected to provide results, or they hurriedly left. Contrasted with my early experience, reporters' lives have immeasurably improved in comfort, stability and general working conditions. A typical instance will bear me out. I remember one evening being put on to the story of a bigamist, all the addresses of whose victims contained in a cash book had been secured by a rival "evening." Had I started in on equal lines I would not have minded, but I had to take on where another reporter on the staff had failed—i.e. twenty-four hours late. There was absolutely nothing to do but work on the scanty clues provided by our rival, which published just as much as it felt like doing—and no more. In the stop-press space of its last edition appeared the name of a new victim, who was described as belonging to South London. The geographical clue, South London, was as vague as could be imagined; worse still was the name which was one of the popular sort like Smith, Thompson or Jones. However, at the end of five hours, on the strength of this slender clue, I managed to unearth the young woman, only to find on arrival that her mouth had been sealed by the rival paper which certainly knew its business. Though

tired by the long search, I was not discouraged. I appealed to the young woman's sense of fair play. I told her my difficulties, how, having no definite address, I had been searching for her for five hours, and she was quick to understand that I should be blamed for any failure to produce a story. Happily, she was not a bad sort, and what information she yielded me was enough to "save my bacon" the next morning, though I must add there were no bouquets flying around.

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Lord Northcliffe wanted as much news as possible in the first editions of his evening paper, and to provide it meant working early and late. The physical strain, as well as the play on the nervous system, was as much as I could stand, even at my age. I can imagine nothing more strenuous than the life led by an evening paper reporter in the days when the *Evening News* and *The Star* were fighting one another, tooth and nail. Besides, in my case there was the further fatigue of the *Sunday Dispatch*<sup>1</sup> work, paid for separately, and done often at the expense of a full night's sleep.

The bulk of my assignments related to crime investigation. To make the pull on the nerves worse a number of irresponsible "fakers" got unpleasantly busy. They invented their own clues, and not infrequently planted objects near murder scenes so as to be the first to proclaim their discovery. When the body of Miss Money was found in Merstham Tunnel, ladies' handkerchiefs, supposed to throw light on the occurrence, kept turning up every hour, only to be contemptuously dismissed by the police as the handiwork of these atrocious jokers. Thus existence, already hard, was unnecessarily burdened by the task of separating the genuine from the false clues. Worn out by my exertions in this case I went to bed somewhere about 2 a.m.—not unduly early. An hour later, the dead woman was identified as an assistant at a dairyman's shop in Clapham Junction. Reporters of more robust physique, better used to late hours, remained downstairs in the hotel, and had the good luck to see the witnesses to the identification arrive. Thus they were able to furnish their papers with a piece of first-class news. Unfortunately I had been asked by a morning paper colleague to keep an eye on developments for him. On learning how he had been "scooped," he was justifiably sore with me.

That working for an evening paper I was not myself affected

<sup>1</sup> The *Sunday Dispatch* was then known as the *Weekly Dispatch*.

in no wise lessened my regret ; through a foolish promise which I had no business to make I had let a friend down. Tired nature had rebelled against the hours I had been keeping. Had my life depended upon it, I doubt whether I could have remained awake another hour.

The police, circumscribed by their official regulations, dare not go out of their way to be very helpful to journalistic inquirers. The tendency at most police stations was to regard reporters as poisonous nuisances, and the familiar answer to all questions was, " we have nothing to say," sometimes varied by the stock remark, " apply at Scotland Yard."

Within recent years conditions have happily changed for the better, and now the relationship between Press and police is one of mutual assistance and, if I may say so, forbearance.

In the bad old days, twenty-five to thirty years ago, a reporter who was fool enough to apply to Scotland Yard for information was kept cooling his heels in a waiting-room for half an hour ; then he would be taken to an inspector whose curt answer, true to the approved formula, was, " sorry we are unable to help you, good day." Thus baffled, reporters were compelled to use underground means of obtaining information, or followed up inquiries based on letters sent to their newspapers. One way or another they secured the news. How I smiled to hear the tall stories of American newspapermen telling of their superior methods with the police ! They had only to lean over the police desk and ask to be shown the " blotter," for the inspector to come round, bowing and scraping, only too anxious to " spill the beans ! "

Sometimes, as a result of this hush-hush policy, too zealous journalists were betrayed into writing the craziest abracadabra, of which the following might stand as typical :—

" Big developments are hourly expected in the Central London Murder. The police are watching *a* man in *a* house in *a* street near the scene of the crime. They require one more clue to justify an arrest and the signs are that it will soon be forthcoming."

What live newspaper to-day would condemn itself by publishing such rubbish ?

Taking the rough with the smooth, I personally had not so much to complain of in my dealings with the police as other journalists. Once indeed the police were the means of getting me a first-class scoop, and my gratitude was none the less real for recognising that at the outset they had not known I was a reporter.

I was seeking information in a murder mystery then causing great public excitement, and was about to enter an outlying police station which I had never before visited, when suddenly a policeman pounced upon me. "Would I join an identification squad in the yard?" I was quite agreeable, and lined up with a number of different-looking men. Then, one by one, witnesses were brought into the yard and asked to point out the man to which their evidence applied. Each in turn picked out the same man. I pricked up my ears at the whisper that he was to be detained on suspicion of being the wanted murderer. Here was I pitch-forked into the very news I was seeking. Frankness with the police being always the best policy, I told the inspector that I was a reporter, suggested that as a reward for my services I be given confirmation of the news, and furthermore be allowed to telephone it to my newspaper. Both requests, I am glad to say, were eventually granted. The result was that we scored by at least two editions.

When any long murder trial at the Old Bailey had ended, it was the fashion among the popular Sunday papers to run as one of their main features the life-story of the condemned man, from his boyhood to the last dread hour when the black-capped judge, in words to thrill the least emotional listener, pronounces his doom, "You shall be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and may God have mercy on your soul!"

As I was the *Evening News* reporter on such occasions, it fell to me to supply the *Sunday Dispatch* with this melodramatic copy, usually running to seven columns, or eight to nine thousand words, written when my day's work for my own paper had ended. If I began as early as 7 p.m., I knew I could finish by 2 a.m. Eau-de-Cologne proved most helpful to my labours. By bathing my face in the fragrant fluid, I managed to keep myself wakeful and refreshed, and so always had a bottle handy in my office drawer. The *Dispatch* had no mercy on indifferent writing. They demanded a good average style, picturesque and colourful, and since they never returned what I wrote, I took it that I did not fall short of their expectations. A point that told in my favour was my reliability. The sub-editors could always depend on my copy being in the basket when they arrived next morning.

Practice gave me a facility in this form of writing, and in addition to reporting the Old Bailey trials for the *Evening News* and the *Dispatch*, I did a descriptive column each day for the *Daily Mirror*, of which the kind-hearted Alec Kenealy was Editor. While I sat in Court and turned out my melodramatic stuff for the *Evening News*, my friend, Percy Potter of the *London News*



Agency, to which we were subscribers, fed me with the actual evidence ; otherwise I should have been "stuck."

The Old Bailey interested me most whenever Charlie Mathews was present as Crown Prosecutor. Then the Court had the tense and emotional atmosphere of a great play finely acted. Indeed the public attempted to treat the Court as a theatre, and in the public seats might be found many notabilities of the day. Famous actors predominated. Invariably an early arrival would be H. B. Irving who specialised in criminology.

I was present at the Old Bailey when, point by point, Mathews established the guilt of Devereux, the trunk murderer. While he was in the witness-box, the nerves of the wretched prisoner must have been completely set on edge by counsel's low, hissing voice and dramatic forefinger. Devereux had meant to lie his way to freedom, but the questions snapped at him by his tormentor made his answers sound pitifully inadequate and confused. As, under the thin light which stole into the Court, he faced his accuser, his face showed up ashen grey. I never saw a man who more clumsily manœuvred the noose round his neck. I never saw a murderer more emphatically write his own death sentence. As he ended his cross-examination I was impressed by the listless, lifeless look of utter weariness that came over Mathews, as though the effort had used up all his energy. There ebbed away what little life's blood remained under the tightly drawn skin of that lean, intellectual visage, leaving him as pale as the prisoner who clung for support to the dock rail, in his heart the sure knowledge that hanging would be his portion.

Listening to Mathews' melodramatic voice, and watching his changeful movements—the thrust of the accusing finger, the poise of the delicate hand, the twist of the spare, smoothly hinged body—my thoughts instinctively went back to Irving in *Louis XI*, for here in this hushed court of assize some such actor's blood functioned and was eloquent. . . .

The years went by, when in the course of my daily ramblings through London I unexpectedly came upon Sir Charles Mathews—the last time I was ever to see him in life. He was painfully clambering down the steps of the Brompton Oratory. What I saw written in his face alarmed me. Death was already beginning to inscribe there its inexorable hieroglyphics. The expression in the once glittering eye was of one who was not long for this vale of tears. Greeting him I felt myself so chilled that I had no more enjoyment of that fair morning. Not from idle curiosity, but swayed by deep pity, I stood and watched him. His lips were moving in prayer. He had no mind for the busy streams of life,

darting hither and thither. Slowly he dragged himself along the Brompton Road. I had a certain premonition I should never meet him again ; written in the ashen look I had just glimpsed was farewell to all his earthly achievement. A few days later the newspapers told me of his death.

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Much of a reporter's work is disillusionment. I was sent to interview the oldest living woman in England, a centenarian aged 105. She lay in the comfortable ward of a workhouse infirmary, and, as David Hume might say, Charon would not long be kept waiting. I had heard of hale and hearty centenarians, and here at last I should see for myself whether all were so fortunate. Report spoke of the old lady as being in full possession of her faculties, able to talk entertainingly on such subjects as the Battle of Waterloo, Queen Victoria's girlhood, Lord Melbourne's Premiership and the romantic youth of Disraeli. Rich material on the face of it for any interviewer. When I entered the ward, Granny, who had come into the world in time to inhale the last fragrance of the eighteenth century, shrank back into her bed, and seemed to shrivel up. As I stood by her side she looked at me with unseeing eyes, and her pitiable mouth gave forth sounds which to my unpractised ears carried neither meaning nor sense.

The gentle nurses who knew the old lady's history found coherence in the hollow articulations ; by what means I could not imagine. I took down their statements in mechanical shorthand equivalents, yet what moved in my inner consciousness was not thought of the excellent "copy" I was gathering ; only the feeling that I ought to have been spared contact with such advanced senility. I had never seen anybody so old, nor one so far decayed. At any moment the flickering heart might stop and the process of disintegration be complete. Disillusionment came thick and fast. The Psalmist had spoken of threescore years and ten as the normal span of life. There was a dignity and a triumph about gracious old age. But what was there desirable about extreme old age, accompanied by loss of all the powers that made existence tolerable ? Who would wish to linger on to the state of this ancient lady, now no more than a mummy, her breathing a pained, uncertain effort, the sounds of her mouth mere fluted echoes from hollow, sunken cheeks ? Threescore years and ten ! She had lived half as long again, though many months must have seen her thirsty for the sleep from which there is no awakening.

Gazing at the sorrowful sight I asked myself, where now should one seek the eighteenth-century charm that had been the setting

for this ancient lady's dawn ! Out of the lifeless presence and the lifeless sounds which stood for a voice, I went into the street of quick men and women, into the glare of the noonday summer sun, whose rays, if they scorched my body, left my soul still cold and desolate. I thought of this old lady, a mere shell agitated by a few vibrations, when Lord Rosebery, chained to his arm-chair, answered congratulations on his seventy-eighth birthday, saying, "Congratulations ! You cannot be very happy at seventy-eight." And Granny had lived over a quarter of a century longer.

Humorous interludes diversified the day's work, mild compensation for moments of disillusionment. In a burst of confidence an Army colonel whom I had occasion to interview, solemnly assured me that he always believed in treating journalists like gentlemen.

In token of friendship a lively young M.P. showed me the secret invention he had just perfected. When he turned the latchkey of his front door, automatically the door of his whisky cupboard opened.

The underground railway authorities had a complaint box, into which one day there dropped this puzzling letter :—

"Your line is three thousand years behind the times."

Asked to be more explicit, the writer of the letter replied,

"Three thousand years ago Balaam sat on his ass. I have never sat down . . . since your line was opened."

A famous painter went to America. His reception must have been disappointing, for on his return he refused to be interviewed. A friend of mine sought his impressions. What did he think of that great country ? Tired of being badgered, the painter cleared his throat. "I met a decent nigger," he said.

Among my acquaintances was a wealthy father who sought to interest his pleasure-loving son in some congenial occupation. Eventually he succeeded. The son chose the insurance business, taking up that branch which specialised in the insurance of dancers' legs, with himself as Inspector of Claims.

Under a relative's will a self-made man of great obstinacy was left a large house, unfortunately not in a good state of repair. The roof wanted reslating and leaked badly into the bargain. The legatee insisted that it was the executors' duty to foot the bill for necessary repairs. Their reply was that, as he had been left the house, they would see him in a warm place first before they would contribute a dime. "Very well," said the obstinate man, "nothing will be done." As the rain poured in, he vacated the top floor and went to the floor below. When that became untenable, he descended another flight. He breathed his last in the house-keeper's room in the basement, the only dry place left. He had died game and happy, having kept his word not to spend a penny piece on the house.

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A charming lady of considerable possessions was in the habit of rising from her bed at two o'clock in the afternoon. Tradesmen desirous of seeing her had to seek midnight appointments, or be at call in the small hours of the morning, when she felt lively enough to talk business. One week-end she ran over to Paris, intending to return mid-week. As the days and weeks went by, and still there was no sign of her, friends began to feel anxious. They could have saved themselves any worry. All that had happened was that the lady had been unable to get up in time to catch the only available fast train back, and in default of any other solution was waiting for the railway company to arrange a more convenient train.

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With a £1000 a year settled income, a human oddity decided he had insufficient means to give him the thrills he needed. As there existed no hope of obtaining more he fell back on this course; he would live for one month at the rate of £10,000 a year, and for the rest of the year like a poor man on a shilling or two a day. Regularly he moved into an expensive suite at a West End hotel; then, when the amount allotted for the period of extravagance had been spent, resumed his place among the denizens of Rowton House, content to wait until funds accumulated to enable him once more to live like a lord.

## CHAPTER X

### JABEZ BALFOUR SETS UP A RECORD

N EARLY thirty years ago, moving in and out of Carmelite House, I would notice a dark, handsome man with nicely shaped features, an attractive moustache and firmly rounded chin. As much as anything what drew my attention was the glimpse of immaculate white spats over shining boots. These looked as if an enormous amount of time and labour had been spent on them. In my memory, too, there is the suggestion of a leather watch-chain, then fashionable, strapped to a waistcoat buttonhole. My colleagues told me that I was gazing at the great Edgar Wallace, who, far from nourishing a literary ambition, was now set on making money on the advertisement side. He was bringing out a Saturday shopping edition of the *Evening News*, and if his talents had been of a business order he should have piled up money galore. But Edgar did not possess a business brain. When, in due course, the *Evening News* people found this out, they transferred him to more congenial labours, and what became of their Shoppers' Edition is neither here nor there.

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When Sir Henry Irving died, clearly the most appropriate person to appraise him was Sir Henry Beerbohm Tree. But Tree was most unhappy over the obligation and begged to be excused. Whatever tribute he paid his dead professional brother would, he said, be condemned by the uncharitable as insincere, since people knew only too well how little liking they had for one another. In the end I overcame Tree's hesitation, and he delivered a eulogy that had a genuine ring about it.

I had no doubt that Irving's intellectual subtlety had poisoned the relationship. He could not see that each in his own way was an incomparable artist. Because Tree's methods were different and paid marked deference to popular psychology, Irving had nothing but sneers and scorn for his acting. "Watch this man Tree crawl down to the public level" might well have expressed the sense of Irving's attitude.

When Tree played Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, perhaps his most

brilliant role, Irving sat through the performance with eyes and ears only for the adroit musical effects introduced to popularise the production. At the fall of the curtain, friends could extract from him only one devastating remark, "song and dance! song and dance!", uttered in a piercing, stagey voice to make it sound more shattering. Of Tree's acting, a masterpiece of characterisation, not a solitary word—just that maddening phrase, "song and dance! song and dance!"

Ellen Terry, comparing their respective performances as Mephistopheles, hit off the essential difference between the two men. Irving, she said, could suggest Satan by the mere movement of his face and by a turn of expression. Tree would want a pencil that gave out sparks as he wrote.

Although he achieved a considerable success Tree was never satisfied, and sighed to think how much farther he might have gone had he been blessed with the face of Godfrey Tearle.

I made an early friend of Cecil Raleigh, the dramatist, who regularly produced the Drury Lane thrillers. Usually when he had company the guests were given a vivid description of his eighteenth-century sideboard, with receptacles that had their convenient use in a day when the drunken rakes could stagger no farther than the other side of the room

A grey and timid man, who seemed desirous of escaping recognition, sometimes passed us by in Whitefriars Street, and I would turn to a companion and say: "there goes Jabez Balfour!" Did ever one of God's creatures look more inoffensive? If I were asked that question, I should most certainly answer "no." Jabez Balfour had the expression of a man who would not harm a fly, let alone a human being. What a sensation the publication of his prison experiences in the *Sunday Dispatch* created! So well kept was the secret that this paper had secured his memoirs, that even the *Evening News*, printed in the same building and under the same proprietorship, remained wholly in the dark. Indeed when Jabez was released, I, in common with the reporters of other newspapers, scoured round to get hold of him. I tried the offices of Long John O'Connor, the enormously tall Irish Nationalist M.P. who was understood to be acting for Balfour, but when I mentioned the *Evening News* he smiled, and remarked that I should go back where I came from, as they were in a better position to give than demand news of Jabez.

This cryptic remark puzzling my brain, I returned to the office,

only to learn that Jabez Balfour had been put under contract to the *Sunday Dispatch*, and sent into hiding, somewhere in the country, so as to elude the other newspapers. This "spiriting away" of "celebrities" featured in the news became a general proceeding. When a newspaper had secured the hero of a great popular sensation, they took precious care that no one else should have access to him until they had done with him. When I happened to be on the winning side, life was pleasant; when a rival paper held all the trump cards and I was still expected to score tricks, life was one long headache.

After an extended acquaintance with Sunday paper features, I am persuaded that none ever created a sensation comparable with that provoked by Jabez Balfour's prison reminiscences. For this there was a twofold reason: they were the first of their kind to be presented to the curious public, and the matter offered was really interesting and revealing. Jabez proved an apt observer, able to tell a straightforward story with a multitude of human touches. In respect to the excitement they were to create, his reminiscences were never to be approached by any other notable Sunday paper feature, not excluding the story of John Lee, the Babbacombe murderer they could not hang, the spiritualistic revelations of the Rev. Vale Owen, the serial publication of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and the prison memoirs of Horatio Bottomley.

After he had recovered £5,000 as compensation from the government for being wrongfully convicted, Adolf Beck might often be met walking in the West End. He lived comfortably in mansions in New Oxford Street and had developed a nice taste in clothes and cigars. In his smart silk topper, morning coat and striped trousers, he could easily be mistaken for a prosperous stockbroker.

In New Oxford Street I ran into Charles Dawson, who at the beginning of the century was champion billiards player. From his having played regularly at Messrs Orme's rooms in Manchester I knew him well. He looked glum and worried, and in the foyer at Frascati's confessed to being haunted. That was the reason for his troubled expression. Whenever he played, there was sure to be opposite him a man with such piercing eyes that they diverted his attention from the ball. True, the man did nothing but stare, yet what mischief lay in that fixed look! His hoodoo might not always sit in front, but wherever he

sat he exerted the same hypnotic power—so poor Dawson would have me believe. I tried to convince him that he was suffering from pure hallucination; yet the best I could do to cheer him up was to promise to publish his strange story. He had the idea that publicity might frighten off his supposed persecutor.

Then, destined to live a golden hour in the newspapers, the mysterious Mr. Yates with his peculiar philanthropic methods swam into the orbit of my professional existence. Ask the oldest Covent Garden porters if they remember Mr. Yates! Ask them if they recollect the big-hearted benefactor who, with pockets stuffed with bank notes and sovereigns, walked into the fruit market and proceeded to convert it into a corner of old Baghdad! In case their memory be faint on the point, let me remind them of this conversation between Mr. Yates and a porter unloading boxes from a wagon:

MR. YATES: "What's the size of your family, my good man?"

THE PORTER (*suspiciously*): "I've four children and a wife, 'Guv'nor.'"

MR. YATES: "Well, here's something for you, my good fellow. Share a little of it with your mates."

In the porter's hand rested four crisp £25 notes.

When other porters had received "fivers", and a vendor of handkerchiefs the comparative trifle of £3, Mr. Yates returned to his hotel. Next morning on coming down to breakfast he found 50,000 begging letters waiting for him, and since there was no telling when the avalanche would cease, Mr. Yates, like the Arab in the desert, decided to fold up his tent and steal silently away. When he had gone the papers discovered he was a partner in a Lancashire firm of ironfounders, who believed in charity on unconventional lines.

I was sitting in the office early one morning, waiting for something to turn up, when a message came in: "Billie Burke has had her jewellery stolen." There being no reason to suspect an artful press agent yarn, I raced off to Swiss Cottage where she was living.

Reaching there before 8.30 a.m., I am afraid I disturbed the lady's beauty sleep. She emerged from her room, a dainty vision in a sumptuous dressing-gown. Though I have seen most of the theatrical beauties of the last thirty years at close range, I do not remember one with charms at all comparable with hers, as then presented to my grateful and wide-open eyes. True



I was young and impressionable at the time, but I knew beauty when I saw it, and I say that Billie Burke was sheer loveliness under the severest test of all, to be seen first thing in the morning, minus any of the familiar, artificial aids to beauty. I was not in the least surprised when that connoisseur in looks, Florenz Ziegfeld, the theatrical producer, gave her his hand and heart, and to the last hour of his life was to be her ardent admirer. Billie Burke has always had the reputation of being most *soignée*. They say that when travelling she carries a hairbrush for each separate hair on her head, and a brush for each tooth in her prettily shaped mouth.

Another morning a runner brought word that a woman in one of the London suburbs had discovered documents and letters of great value, proving her claim to a vast estate for which heirs had long been sought. We were heartily sick of all these claimant stories which generally ended in smoke, but as a matter of precaution dare not neglect any ; so I was told off to investigate the latest of the crop. I found the aspirant to fortune living in a cottage whose door opened from the outside ; I knocked and was told to enter. A woman sat up in bed so scantily clad, that the ordeal of having to answer my questions must, I felt, seriously inconvenience her. Whereupon with muttered apologies for intruding and so quickly leaving, I incontinently fled. There was lacking in me the spiritual self-sufficiency of the Scottish Elder who, meeting in a remote country lane a lightly attired coryphée from a sylvan school who was dancing the Pipes of Pan, gazed with steadfast eyes at the monstrous apparition ; then, sternly shaking his head, slowly and deliberately remarked : " I dinna believe it."

I was in St. Raphael those memorable days when, after his collapse, they brought Joseph Chamberlain to a villa in Valescure, in the hope that the Mediterranean air would help his recovery. In return for being paid a proportion of my expenses, I arranged to keep the *Evening News* posted with the latest news of the notable invalid, meanwhile enjoying a cheap Riviera holiday. It was a mission which, if it were to be carried out without giving offence to the family, required delicacy and tact. I explained my business to Neville Chamberlain who was accompanying his father, and I fancy no exception could be taken either to the news I telegraphed, or to the manner in which I procured it. Leaning heavily on his wife's devoted arm to steady himself, the veteran statesman making his fitful appearances in the gardens

of the villa was a pathetic figure of weakness. He still wore his monocle, painful reminder of past glories. Beyond the special diet to which he was limited, and the daily report of the state of his health, there was little to record. It was far from my desire to harry the feelings of the public by emphasising how dreadfully ill he looked.

One of the most awkward jobs ever thrust upon me was to interview a financier whose affairs were being widely discussed. Access was barred by a zealous, argus-eyed secretary of powerful build, who had only to suspect that you were a reporter to slam the door in your face. Yet, as the door opened, you caught tantalising glimpses of the elusive financier seated at his desk. I was so persistent a caller that the exasperated secretary threatened to subject me to bodily violence. Determined not to be beaten, I concocted a scheme the essence of which was that, as the door opened to my rat-a-tat, a fat friend should violently push me past the secretary and well into the room. The plan worked splendidly. I was precipitated almost at the feet of the financier, who looked up in astonishment to find me suddenly descending upon him.

"What the devil does this intrusion mean?" he angrily demanded.

I explained that this unconventional method of approach was the only way I could find of reaching him, adding without a stop that I was sure he would not regret speaking to me, as *I was so different* from other reporters. From the way I had introduced myself he obviously thought I *was* different, for after humming and ha-ing, and saying that fellows like me ought to be shot, he loosened up and gave me quite a good interview, and an admirable cigar into the bargain. All that spoilt my pleasure was the expression on the face of the secretary as I left. If looks could kill, I should have dropped dead at his feet.

As I was assumed to have more "cheek" than anybody else on the staff, it generally fell to my lot to interview such "impossibles" as the American millionaires who came to London, in particular the elder Pierpont Morgan, who, if he said "thanks" to a waiter, thought he was becoming dangerously loquacious. My total bag from a dozen attempts on these poker-faced gentlemen was two epigrams and a piece of advice:

*A sucker always does it twice.*

*Nobody ever lost money by taking a profit.*

*Cut your loss and take your profit.*

Having inquiries regarding high finance to make at the famous bank in New Court, St. Swithin's Lane, I frequently introduced myself to the three celebrated Rothschild brothers, Nathaniel (Lord Rithschild), Leopold and Alfred. It was Lord Rothschild, who asked how he made money on the Stock Exchange replied, "By selling too soon," and it was a confidant of the bank who, questioned on the value of Stock Exchange advice, remarked that, having for forty years kept a notebook of brokers' tips, he could safely say that if he had acted on them he would have been ruined four times over.

The three brothers sat round a big table, the bearded Nathaniel at the head, Leopold at the side, the fastidious Alfred at the far end, the latter looking for all the world like a *grand seigneur* left over from the Third Empire. The policy of the diplomatic trio was to be extremely pleasant to newspaper callers, but at the same time to tell them nothing. If pressed too closely, Brother Nathaniel would hold his hand to his ear and complain of deafness. Brother Leopold had better attend to you. He in turn would refer you to suave Brother Alfred, who usually fell back on such profuse apologies for being unable to enlighten you, that you felt uneasy about pressing your questions. If it were lunch-time, Brother Alfred would ask you to take a little cold chicken and tongue and a glass of hock in the pleasant dining-room. The generosity of the Rothschilds was most embarrassing. To express satisfaction with a cigar was more often than not the prelude to the offer of a whole box, the invitation being couched in such language as to rob it of any cause for offence.

When subsequently I gave Lord Northcliffe a description of my experiences at the Rothschild bank, his only remark was, "That is all very well, but when it comes to the pinch which of the three brothers says 'yes' and 'no'?"

The eldest son, the Hon. Walter de Rothschild, now Lord Rothschild, must have been plagued by the quaint stories, mostly quite unfounded, to which his hobby as an enthusiastic naturalist gave rise. A £10,000 flea just added to his collection was supposed to have escaped in the bank. That I took to be the invention of a sly humorist. His father was said to have had his entrance to the Rothschild bank barred by two tiny bears, which a wild animal dealer had brought along for the son to see. As this pleasant story came from the lips of the animal dealer in question, I had less reason to disbelieve it.

## CHAPTER XI

### WHEN HEAD-LINES WERE INSPIRED

ONE could not pick on a more characteristic period to illustrate the Fleet Street scene of my younger days than 1906, the year in which the *Daily Mail* was proclaiming a sale five times as large as any morning contemporary. Lord Northcliffe's outspoken and enterprising journal had created a tremendous stir with the bold assertion that the Marquis Townshend, father of the present peer, was being detained in his private house in Brook Street, Mayfair, under circumstances urgently calling for inquiry. As a representative of the *Evening News* I was allowed to interview the little Marquis, who certainly looked ill, though it was his strained voice, rather than his appearance, which proved disturbing. The pretty wife wearing, as was her custom, a Romney toilette with flowing veil, sat by the side of the bed talking to her father, Thomas Sutherst, a barrister who had been both labour leader and financier, and was fated to go down with the *Lusitania*. He had a most agreeable, trained voice which made the contrast with the harsh accents of his son-in-law all the more conspicuous. Legal processes followed the *Daily Mail* revelations, the upshot being the appointment of Crown officials to manage the affairs of the Marquis. In after years, when casually I ran across him, the diminutive peer always struck me as ideally happy in the society of his versatile wife, then doing a good deal of writing for the Press.

The present peer, when quite a small boy, met Princess Marie Louise at Raynham, the ancestral hall. "Be careful you do not slip," he said warningly to her. Then, as an afterthought, "Can a royal Princess slip?" He seemed most concerned when assured that royal princesses could slip as easily as anyone else.

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The year 1906 was remarkable for the number of actresses who married peers or millionaires, as well as for an outburst of the "Stage Door Johnny" mania, when young men with more money than sense felt compelled to leave handsome presents for

footlight beauties whose acquaintance they desired to cultivate. These gifts, I have no doubt, were promptly, even indignantly returned.

Surprises in the theatrical world provided newspapers with a continuous supply of talking points. I remember being sent off to the Vaudeville Theatre where the fat was in the fire owing to trouble with Edna May. Resentful of Camille Clifford's "Gibson Girl" boom, she had retired in high dudgeon from the cast of *The Belle of Mayfair*. As the "star" of the piece the beautiful Edna considered that the "star" song, "Why do they call me a Gibson Girl?" should have been given to her, with the words changed to, "Why do they call me a Picture Girl?" C. Dana Gibson, the American illustrator, was then at the height of his fame, and as in face and form Camille Clifford was true to the type which he drew and popularised, she immediately began to enjoy a sensational vogue on the stage, a fact which men of my generation who patronised the theatre will vividly recollect.

To turn from the frivolous to the serious, to the political world in fact, we had Keir Hardie just beginning his leadership of the Labour Party, assisted by two young men of promise, Ramsay MacDonald, described as an emotional Scot, and Arthur Henderson, reputed to be a most able organiser. Philip Snowden, "a young man with a future," was explaining in the *Daily Mail* the aims of the Labour Party which, he reminded us, were "state-ownership of the railways, mines and canals, and taxation of the very rich to restore to Labour the wealth taken from it."

Romance had entered a King's palace; Spanish Alfonso was pledging his troth to Princess Ena, and, as part of his ardent wooing, had placed near his heart the two red roses which she had given him, having first kissed them.

I was busy recording the successful lectures of Dr. Emil Reich, who for the benefit of ageing Dowagers, prominently included in the fashionable audiences assembled at Claridge's, expounded the philosophy of love; challenging popular opinion with the emphatic view that after forty men and women ceased to be interested in the gentle passion.

The community of journalists felt the poorer for the passing of "The Skibbereen Eagle", who as the owner of a Cork penny paper published every Saturday had attained a measure of renown quite out of proportion to the influence of his journal. Across the top of the front page was displayed an Eagle descending with a message to the world. When the Tsar of all the Russias had done something to displease the Cork newspaper autocrat, whose name

was Frederick Peel Eldon Potter, a vehement leading article warned the Emperor that "The Skibbereen Eagle has its eye on Russia." Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, similarly warned, quoted the article in Parliament, and from that day onward *The Skibbereen Eagle* was a constant source of wonder and amusement to the Anglo-Saxon world. How long lived a phrase can be ! A leading article in *The Times* from the pen of Captain Sterling opened one morning with the words, "We thundered forth the other day an article on the subject of social and political reform," and *The Times* became permanently known as *The Thunderer*. I do not pretend to be offering any surprisingly new information, but there are people who may not have heard it before.

For the sensation-loving public there were the frenzied scenes which followed the arrival in London of Dr. Dowie, the profligate prophet of Zion City, the exposure of whose villainy had been sufficiently lurid to excite two hemispheres. He had taken up his quarters in the Euston Road, and from this sally port advanced a valiant attack on sin. But more than sinners gathered round his banner, and the commotion evoked was comparable only with the tumult aroused by the Clapton Apocalypse of the Rev. J. H. Smyth Piggott, who with Sister Ruth was to make The Abode of Love, Spaxton, Somersetshire, a shrine not only for the faithful, but for a horde of journalists in search of delectable copy. When I remember the millions of words which represented the publicity given in the Sunday newspapers to the history of these two remarkable clergymen, I realise how sedate in comparison was the advertisement offered to the affairs of the unfortunate rector of Stiffkey, who flourished sixteen years later.

Tired of the exploits of adventurous parsons, people were disposed to turn their attention to the warnings of men able to read correctly the signs of the times—men who were convinced that Germany was preparing a Day of Reckoning for Britain. To allow these warnings to sink in, the *Daily Mail* ran a serial, "The invasion of 1910," the main feature of which was a description of the siege of London. The actual story was written by William Le Queux, but several chapters came from the pen of H. W. Wilson, who had played an important part in designing the serial. He and "Bobs" (Lord Roberts) in consultation had sketched the probable route which an invading German army landing in England would take, their ideas being subject to the approval of Lord Northcliffe. Shown the German line of march

according to Wilson and Lord Roberts, the great newspaper man caustically remarked that, from a military point of view, it might be all right, but from a circulation point of view, it was all wrong. "Bobs" or no "Bobs," the Germans must pass through towns of size, not keep to remote one-eyed country villages, where there was no possibility of large *Daily Mail* sales. That thus transformed to suit his argument, the invaders' route became a little zig-zag, and a bit of a chase round the mulberry bush, and not at all what the astute Von Moltke would have planned, did not unduly strain the credulity of the bulk of the *Daily Mail* readers, or prevent the serial from being an enormous success. Lord Northcliffe was justified in his objections, and the voluble protests of doddering generals in Pall Mall clubs—"By Gad, sir! The thing's preposterous"—was so much wasted splutter.

This same year Edgar Wallace was reporting the Algeciras Conference, his messages good, breezy, readable journalism, and Charlie Hands, perhaps the best all-round descriptive writer the *Daily Mail* ever possessed, was recording the General Election, a humorous eye bent on Winston's flat-topped felt hat, destined to become the first in a remarkable headgear dynasty.

The light shone out from Stonecutter Street where the presiding genius was Ernest Parke, the *Star's* most famous editor, easily distinguished by his benevolent features, his wide-brimmed, Quaker-like hat, and, of course, his Radical views. While Carmelite House was ready to snap up any good *Star* men, the rule in the rival office was that no Harmsworth disciple need apply. While personally friendly, Parke told me to my face that, were I ten times as good, he would not engage me. Having once taken the Harmsworth gold, I was beyond the power of redemption. The *Evening News* took two of its editors from the *Star*—W. J. Evans and Frank Fitzhugh—and I like to think it was owing to my recommendation that Fitzhugh crossed the Rubicon into the outer darkness of Carmelite House.

Rules, however rigid, cannot prevail against the force of circumstances. Lord Northcliffe laid it down that no man having once left the firm should ever be taken back. He took both Swaffer and myself back, Swaffer twice. Parke said, "No truck with Carmelite House men." Tom Clarke, at one time the Editor of the *Daily News*, and "Quex," the gossip writer, both came from the Harmsworth stable, and, though the *Daily News*<sup>1</sup> is not the *Star*, they are now one and the same family.

<sup>1</sup> The *Daily News* having amalgamated with the *Daily Chronicle* is now known as the *News-Chronicle*.

As a reporter I would often meet on stories Edward Chattaway, who was to become editor of the *Star*, and W. Lints-Smith, now the manager of *The Times*, then news-editor of the *Evening Standard*, which owed to his undisputed enterprise many splendid news-scoops. I was good friends with both, but in particular with Lints-Smith, who had the Editor been equally as keen would have found room for me on the *Evening Standard*.

In wading through the maze of London traffic, Chattaway showed such extraordinary agility that Fleet Street bestowed on him the complimentary nickname of "Jaggers," after the famous messenger boy sent at short notice to America.

What I envied in the *Star* men was their exuberance of spirits and unslaked enthusiasm, expended for the most part in coruscating literary fireworks. When Canonbury and the brilliant Irishman, Ryder, a magnificent classical scholar fresh up from Cambridge, vied with one another for the honour of turning out the most sparkling paragraph or "bright," to use the office language, then we had a real taste of the romantic, the traditional Fleet Street, alas! fated soon to disappear. To give the right touch to a story that pleased the fancy of either of these fastidious journalists, great piles of books would be dragged from the library, and the joy of either, when the right Latin or Greek tag to suit the occasion had been finally unearthed, was comparable to the happiness on a bride's face when the ring is placed on her finger.

Though I was never privileged to witness these two supreme artists at work, I have a colleague's assurance that often the best part of an hour in a slack morning would be taken up with fashioning four erudite lines, complete with headlines, that proclaimed their wit and cultural inspiration to the whole world.

Curiously enough it was Ryder, unrestrained by Cambridge traditions, who introduced the American form of spelling into the *Star* office—labor, honor, jewelry, etc.—the same Ryder who was the hero of an historic Fleet Street anecdote, which I would rather have had credited to me than any one success I was permitted to achieve :

A deaf man appealed for exemption from war service. The military representative objected on the ground that a deaf battalion was just as much a possibility as the newly formed bantam battalions. Ryder headed the story :—

"Deaf or Glory boys,

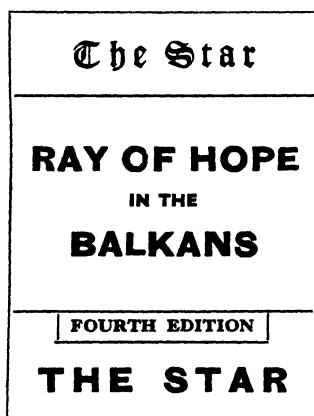
Ear Trumpeter, what are you sounding now?"

Brilliant—and in the rush hours of an evening paper! The story has been told time and again, but to my mind can never be told

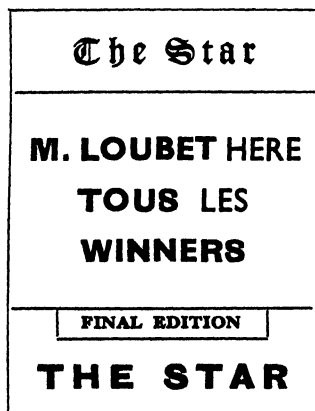


often enough. Let the young newspaper wits of to-day try their hand at going one better, and if they succeed I will gladly take off my hat to them.

While Canonbury and Ryder were polishing their "brights," another of the *Star* men, weary of the interminable fourth edition racing bills, "Captain Coe's Naps for Epsom," or "Finals for Newmarket," decided on a drastic change, one calculated to give the internationally-minded punters of Newington Causeway unwonted thrills. His new bill read as follows :—



When the French President visited London, the bill for the *Star* final edition was :



There worked on the *Star* during the War a little Jewish copy-boy, who had an amazing gift for obtaining such rationed articles as sugar and butter. Tell him either was wanted, and he would

dart into the jungle of the East-end and reappear with a bagful of the precious commodity. While the War lasted the copy-boy was held in high respect, for what others of his kind could claim his Aladdin-like qualities? That boy knew other things. He knew table etiquette. When one of the editorial staff wanted a knife to eat his fish with, he was promptly called to order, "Don't you know, sir," said the disgusted messenger boy, "that it is bad manners to eat fish with a knife!"

To help him over the difficulty of a big paper, one of the morning "subs" was told to "lift" all the matter he could from the same day's issue of the *Daily News*. He did as he was instructed, even to lifting an exclusive *Daily News* apology.

A modest member of the staff, much teased for his handwriting, was to his surprise paragraphed in complimentary terms in the *Newspaper World*. A colleague, seeing the reference, leaned over to him and hoarsely whispered, "How on earth, old boy, did they read your handwriting?"

Pillar of the *Star* for a great number of years, the emotional Pengelly always interested me. To a heart of gold he united an irascible Cornish temperament. Disagreeing with him was a painful business: he regarded it too much as a personal affront, or as a confession of crass ignorance on the other fellow's part. I could always tell his work from the peculiar, vehement note expressive of his spirit running through every sentence. He took sides passionately. Tell him of a supposed injustice, and his blood boiled over. Angry fire darted from under his eyebrows. When the same day as he refused to commute the death sentence on Jacoby, the boy murderer, terribly young to die, the then Home Secretary decided that Ronald True was mad and must not therefore hang, Pengelly, in order to find an outlet for the indignation that threatened to suffocate him, shouted that he would write the story himself. And write it he did, the English that came out of his brain being hot enough to burn and shrivel up the copy-pad. It was this facility for ascending to flaming emotional fury that gave Pengelly's writings marked appeal. Instinctively the reader guesses a man of deep and abiding sincerity and passionate conviction. Pengelly at first was inclined to regard

suspicion, puzzled to know what exactly was my make-up, but in later years he relented and became more cordial in his attitude. When we met we chatted most friendly-like. He saw that I shared some of his sympathies, and that meant so many marks in my favour.

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The authorship of the asterisks, those bright gems of *Star* wit which scarified the follies of the day, could generally be traced to Wilson Pope, whose sense of raillery had been developed to a fine pitch. No one on the staff had the same penetrating, diamond-like wit.

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That in such brilliant company a little *naïveté* should occasionally show itself was perhaps only natural. There was an "innocent" of the *Star*, who reproached for having missed an edition with an important story defended himself in this fashion, "I sent up the copy to the printer, slip by slip. I was so rushed that I did not even have time to write a private letter!"

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What astonished me about the *Star* people was their extraordinary luck in avoiding the quaint slips on which *Punch* feeds. They had never to mourn a sub-editor who took off his hat to the famous German general, "Donner und Blitzen," nor a reporter unable to find the firm of "Knur and Spell" in the telephone directory.

I should hate to believe that with the passing of time, and the fading out of the picturesque personalities of my youthful days, the *Star* office will grow more subdued, or its joyousness in some measure be eclipsed. Respect for its ancient traditions should save it from becoming exactly like other newspaper offices, with hushed sub-editors' room, too quiet to need the old warning that a "bright," polished to the last degree of perfection, was on its way, and, if safe birth were to be assured, absolute silence must prevail.

The saga of the *Star's* days of gaiety is a tale made for delight. I do not remember a time when I have not been a willing listener to one with a page of that racy and delectable history to tell. There was a year when a *Star* sub-editor of the Canonbury era worked at my side. He had the Stonecutter Street flair for headlines; an outstanding story made him all of a flutter; not to be brilliant had been to offend against the Divine injunction. When the afternoon's work was done, and satisfied with our efforts we

leaned back in our chairs, I would whisper to him, "Tell me more of your friends on the *Star*." Thus encouraged, for he was a good talker, there escaped from him a procession of engaging anecdotes in which the old lovable figures, men of marked individuality, stepped out true to life, like Canterbury Pilgrims on the way. Thinking of them now, I have the feeling that accompanying the bohemian atmosphere they breathed, was a keener lust of life, and a larger thirst for enjoyment. To me their disappearance is more than a matter of passing regret. Where again, I ask myself, shall we look for so picturesque an order of men to give Fleet Street character and personality, making it a place apart, genius written across its brow, and wit stamped on its soul?

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In the West End towards lunch time I would often meet a popular financier whom, from frequent interviews for newspaper purposes, I had come to know well. He professed a great liking for my company, and frequently voiced the wish to see me rich and prosperous like himself. "I was a young man once," he would say with great warmth of feeling, "and remember how I had to deny myself things I badly wanted. Later when the money came, gone, alas! was the old, keen sense of enjoyment." In the presence of sentiments so transparently sincere and good-natured, it was impossible not to think kindly of the man. Meeting me one afternoon, he was more cordial than ever. His face positively beamed. Would I come into his office? He had something of deep interest to show me. Once inside his office, he opened a drawer, and produced what he described as the balance sheet of an important company of which he was the managing director. No one but himself knew the contents, but in two or three days' time the information would be public property, and the shares would go sky-high. He had always borne me in mind. Here was a chance for a long-desired *coup* to make me rich. How much money had I saved? I told him. A nice little amount, was his remark. In three days' time it would have increased threefold.

I shook him warmly by the hand, which came honest and firm to my touch, thanked him ever so many times for his generous remembrance of me, and at his urgent pleading "to hurry" jumped into a cab, and was safely delivered at my brokers' office in the City. When I told them what I proposed buying they expressed uneasiness, which fears were not removed by my explanation of the attendant circumstances. However, as I was

insistent they carried out my instructions, involving every penny I had in the world. Rushing back to Fleet Street, quite pleased with myself, I met an experienced confidant to whom I mentioned what I had done. He said, "Falk, you're a damned little ass. You'll end up without a bob to call your own. Take a cab back to your brokers, and wait until they have sold the shares. *Take what you can get.*" Back I went to my brokers, and relieved by my new instructions they sold, and, surprising to relate, at a profit of threepence per share. *Apparently other people had been given the same tip.* A week later the shares dipped heavily, and there came a time when they were utterly worthless.

I continued to meet this good financier—still cordial, still desirous of knowing how I was progressing. Always, as we parted, I sensed the old firm feel in the honest grip of his chubby hand. Curiously enough, we did not discuss money-making any more. He had forgotten entirely about the shares which had met with such regrettable disaster, and I was not churlish enough to remind him. He was my *friend*; he deserved considerate treatment. The years went by, and I saw him stagger from one straitened level to another, a gradual but persistent decline. In the end he could not have been better off than myself. To those who were unaware of the truth, his face continued to be a mirror of his soul. They went on believing him to be a kindly creature animated by the most generous instincts towards his fellow-men. Nobody looking at him would have believed my tale of his share advice, or the elaborate form it took. The man is dead and shall be nameless. Fain would I show him more mercy than he sought to show me.

## CHAPTER XII

### BANG GO MY SAVINGS !

ONE lives and one learns. How often was this refrain to pervade my thoughts ! Before I was thirty I had learned what it means to venture one's barque on the tempting waters of Fleet Street as a fully fledged newspaper proprietor. I was not one of the successful ones. I lost the money I had carefully saved, and for the labour of many months went without reward. Yet, given my life over again, I would plump with certain modifications for the same risks. If in a material sense I finished much worse off than I began, in other respects—spiritually and in all-round journalistic knowledge—I was infinitely richer. No one could question that on balance I had gained by the experience. In any case, better to launch out and fail than remain in a rut all your life, haunted by the melancholy thought of never once having made a bold bid for fortune.

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I quitted the *Evening News* when I was twenty-six years of age, and before I was twenty-seven owned a proprietorial interest in a new weekly and a new London evening paper. It sounds big I know, but seeing the price I paid I am entitled to what little satisfaction there is in the recital of the facts. In the one case the interest was secured by my own hard cash, in the other it was part payment for helping to start the enterprise. All my savings over a period of five years, with such additions as judicious investment had brought, went down the drain ; every penny put by since leaving Manchester was swept into the greedy mouth of the first enterprise. Such was my haste to join the exclusive newspaper-owning class, that I threw caution and policy overboard, and went sailing gallantly towards Carey Street, decidedly lucky to be rescued in the nick of time.

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When as a newspaper proprietor I set out to conquer London, I did not think that the gamble would fail. I had tremendous confidence not only in myself, but in the two colleagues who

were associated with me—men of great experience, judgment and ability—and I was enamoured of the idea of the paper which we had in mind. I realize now that our chance of success would have been greatly improved if I had understood the technique of periodical, as distinct from daily and evening paper, journalism ; and, furthermore, had none of the three been forced by the necessity of earning a livelihood to divert part of his energies elsewhere. Otherwise our failure was largely a matter of ill luck, operating in different ways. Bigger capital at the outset would have given us a more promising start ; once we had put our weekly paper on a profitable basis, the continuance of the new “ evening ” started some time after would have assured its future.

It is easy to criticise myself, and say that I went into what was always a highly speculative venture in far too sanguine a mood to weigh carefully the odds against success ; it is easy to assume that at twenty-six the skies always look blue, and that if the sun be not shining exactly overhead, it is only hiding behind a passing cloud. But my two colleagues, some years my senior, were not less optimistic about our prospects. Why, therefore, blame myself for a legitimate gamble that just failed to come off ? Had it turned out well I should, no doubt, be pluming myself on having had the necessary courage and *nous* to go in and win. If, after all, I do blame myself, it is because I realise now that, in Fleet Street, it is possible to do only one thing at a time, successfully. With the help of my two colleagues I was striving to produce a new weekly paper, a most arduous undertaking, and at the same time struggling desperately hard to earn a living as a free-lance, an equally arduous undertaking. A superman might have succeeded, but, pathetically enough, I was not a superman—hardly more than a fairly competent journalist. Remember I speak for myself. The arguments of my associates, who at least did as much for the new paper, are no doubt quite different. They may reasonably complain that they took me to be a better journalist than I was to prove, and thence proceed to argue that, had I possessed the requisite flair, even with divided energies success would still have been possible. I am not going to say that they would be wrong. I doubt whether I pulled my weight ; nay more, I doubt whether anybody but a journalist of the toughest fibre would have pulled his full weight, lodged in the same plight as that in which I found myself—newly married, without a regular staff job, and all my savings engulfed. There is a human, as well as a journalistic side, to my failure.

As to my partners, one was John Cowley who had been manager of the *Daily Mail*—good enough recommendation ; the other

Charles T. Watney, who had been news editor, foreign editor, parliamentary correspondent, and, I believe, a lot more, on the same great journal. To my pleasurable excited mind we seemed a heaven-sent combination of all the talents. The paper we designed was a high-class penny weekly, a toss-up between the sixpenny *Spectator* and the bright, popular, cheap publications issued by the firms of Harmsworth, Pearson and Newnes. We called it the *Week-end*, fatal name as the Fleet Street wags in due season were to remind us. Admittedly the first numbers could have been better, not so much as regards their contents as typographically. The articles needed to be set out bolder and with that striking variety of lay-out effect which characterises popular journalism to-day. Though we did not know it, the American style of make-up—well spaced-out headings and plenty of white relief—was then the requirement of the hour. But we improved in our methods as we went on, and in time, judged both by literary and typographical standards, our production could be called creditable.

On one of the several occasions when by accident I ran into Kennedy Jones, he remarked, with what I took to be unpardonable lack of generosity, that our first few numbers made him blush to think that a man like myself, who had passed through Carmelite House, should have learned so little. In full trim the paper could boast bright, topical features, neatly displayed, and first-class gossip pages, with quite as entertaining reading as is provided by the lighter weeklies of to-day. Though our capital resources could by no means be considered large, we started in a grand way in ground-floor offices facing Fleet Street; but then, as one answer to Kennedy Jones's sneer, we had learnt this much from Carmelite House, that bold expenditure in the long run is often the cheapest—i.e. you fling your bread courageously on the waters, and if you are lucky it comes back buttered.

Had fortune been on our side, our own money should have been supplemented by outside funds. For several weeks a shrewd Yorkshire mill-owner, who had been introduced by a Stock Exchange friend, flirted with the idea of putting up £15,000. As he professed anxiety to come in with us "on the ground-floor," to repeat his own words, we took his intentions to be really serious. But we never saw him on the ground-floor, or on any other floor. Not a penny of his £15,000 ever came our way.

Looking back on the hectic events of that period of my life, nothing stands out more vividly in my memory than the pleasing knowledge of how soon the *Week-end* took on the air and com-



plexion of a well-balanced, old-established journal. There were weeks when our spirits ran high, and we fancied success could not be far away. We made a big stir with a special King Edward memorial number, in the writing up of which Watney, who had unrivalled sources of information, excelled himself. His inside account of the monarch's last moments, told with many exclusive anecdotes of His Majesty's life, created a justifiably keen demand for the paper. If only we had been able to keep it up! Another good week followed the publication of a saucy, catchy article entitled, "Why King Manuel went to Daly's Theatre twice," an idea emanating from my own giddy brain. Popular curiosity having been aroused, there was a big sale for the paper in the West End and in good-class neighbourhoods generally. What appeal we made was largely to the educated and prosperous classes, but as it was also necessary to reach the masses, we ran a serial with the attractive title of "Peggy o' Lyons'," the work of an adroit and resourceful journalist, A. J. Little. As a result, the waitresses at many of the cafés became readers of the paper, and when I lunched at Lyons' (eggs on toast and tea) I heard their comments. Unfortunately there were not enough Lyons' waitresses in the country to save us. Whereas we wanted readers by the tens of thousands, they were to be numbered only by the thousand.

After "Peggy o' Lyons'" we published a sensational serial from the pen of Holt White, then news-editor of the *Daily Express*; now on the *Morning Post*. Wise in his generation, Holt White stipulated he should be paid on the nail. As he delivered each instalment, so he expected and received his money.

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Sometimes to cheer ourselves up, Cowley and I would saunter round the news kiosks, inquiring how sales were going. The look of settled melancholy on the face of a youth in charge of one of these stands provoked my sympathy. "Was anything amiss?" He fidgeted with his hands a moment or two before replying, "Guv'nor, the accounts are wrong."

If our own accounts were not wrong, they were in a decidedly uncomfortable state. It was a case of all going out and little coming in. I had neither the sang-froid of Watney, who had always the regular and onerous position of news-editor of the *Standard* to take the worry off his chest, nor the temperamental calm of Cowley, who judiciously summed up life's values, and anyhow was comparatively well-to-do. I did not like to see my hard-won savings "sunk without a trace," and I was disturbed by the

knowledge that working for a living must mean corresponding neglect of the bigger end,—putting on its feet the paper of which I was part-owner. Though I had drifted into half-measures, they were alien to my disposition.

When our situation had reached a most depressing stage, suddenly bright gleams appeared on the horizon. We began to build up a reputation for the excellence and accuracy of our racing information. This was contributed by Edgar Wallace, who often invited us to believe that he would rather have been a successful turf prophet than a successful novelist. Whenever he tipped a long-priced winner there was a heavy run on the paper, and to capitalise these successes we displayed, for the edification of small gaping crowds round our windows, the identical tips cut from the paper.

When with capital fast running dry we had to make up our minds what to do with the *Week-end*, it did not require much cogitation to arrive at the same conclusion as Edgar Wallace, whose advice was, "Turn it into a complete racing paper." Though in Watney's case it went sorely against the grain to see a paper started with such high ambitions brought down to so commonplace a level, he shrugged his shoulders contentedly like a good scout, and away went Wallace to work his will on our unfortunate property. The *Week-end* became the *Week-end Racing Supplement*, notorious among all punters as being dead on the mark with long-priced outsiders that miraculously romped home.

Like Aaron's rod, the racing pages swallowed up all the other features. Simultaneously with the revolution in the style of the paper, we cut down expenditure to the bone, abandoning for one thing the expensive offices in Fleet Street. Moderate-priced rooms in Temple Chambers were now all we needed. The change in our fortunes was instantaneous and magical. Instead of losing we began to make money, tapping the various lucrative sources of revenue open to a racing paper with an extensive sale such as ours enjoyed. With production costs low, we had every reason to anticipate a permanent success. Such were our fond hopes that we actually disbursed a dividend, though the wiser plan had been to retain the money in the business as nucleus of a substantial reserve.

The whole editorial control was vested in Edgar Wallace, but it was always an anxious problem how long his temperament would tolerate the surprising drudgery of editing a paper—racing or otherwise. We should have known that, sooner or later, the

imaginative qualities which ultimately were to make him the brilliant novelist and playwright would demand expression, and then "good-bye" to full-time editing on his part. For the sake of all of us it would have been better to have relieved Wallace of the responsibilities of editorship, and left him only to supervise the contents; yet we had to remember he was a most difficult person to manage. Any suggestion of that nature would have caused him to throw in his hand. As it was, with every desire to be fair to him, I am bound to say that he unmistakably tired. Irrespective of temperamental handicaps, he had too many irons in the fire. Our new evening paper did not help matters. It exhausted his energies, and the *Week-end*, which had always to meet terrific competition, found him stale and tired.

But when all is said and done, I doubt whether Wallace, with all his brilliant parts and resourcefulness, was ever cut out to be an editor. For our ultimate failure, I am not going to lay any considerable portion of the blame on him. In the end what killed the *Week-end Racing Supplement* was lack of capital and the unexpected collapse of the system under which the *Evening Times* was being financed. Had the "evening" prospered, it would have been the easiest matter in the world to have put the "weekly" in the same condition, for it must never be forgotten that the average loss on either paper in the last few weeks was ridiculously small. With both papers going well, no doubt we should have come to a sensible arrangement with Wallace—relieved him of any form of drudgery, and used his admirable brain to give the paper inspiration and a limited measure of control.

Many journalists will remember the *London Evening Times*, the name given to the new paper which was courageously started in opposition to the existing "evenings," notably the *Evening News* and the *Star*, both powerfully entrenched. In all the *Evening Times* lasted about fifteen months. It should have lasted indefinitely, for on the merits of the thing death was not deserved. Whatever doubts on mature reflection I may have about the right of the *Week-end* to survive, I have none about that of the *Evening Times*. It was a good paper which ought not to have perished. Here I felt in my element. Who would not after five years on the *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, and the same number of years on the *London Evening News*? Again, where might one seek a finer asset than the daily paper experience of Watney and Cowley?

The title, chosen after most anxious thought, had a dignified sound about it, and fulfilled the one-syllabled condition which Lord Northcliffe laid down as essential either to daily or evening

paper success. Street newsboys, shouting the name of a paper, ask for something simple and easy to get their tongues round, understandable when one recollects the ceaseless repetition throughout the day of the name of a paper.

"Mail," "News," "Globe," "World," "Post," "Sun," "Call" are examples of one-syllabled newspaper titles that can be praised. The answer of the Whitechapel hawker walking about with a pack on his shoulders, applies equally to newsboys. Asked to explain why he shouted "Ole Clo'" instead of "Old clothes," he replied, "Try shouting 'Old clothes' a hundred times, then do the same thing with 'Ole Clo',' and at the end of the day you'll soon see which suits you best."

Our adoption of the excellent title of *Evening Times* did not go unchallenged. We had to prove our rights to its use, though it was not *The Times* of London that made the trouble. Nothing that we ever touched was free from some awkwardness, but possibly our experience was not different from most people's.

Of the new "evening," Watney was Editor, Cowley managing director, Wallace racing editor and special writer, A. J. Little assistant editor, myself news-editor. Chief credit for the inception of the *Evening Times* was due to Watney, who secured the greater part of the finance, and schemed out most of the editorial features. Mostly the available capital was subscribed by M.P.'s known to the Editor, but it was dangerously small, though our feeling was that as we progressed we should be able to secure whatever funds we needed—a complete illusion on our part, as we afterwards discovered. To-day what journalist in his right mind would venture on a new London "evening" which had not the resources of a prosperous newspaper business to fall back upon, and in addition a utilisable reserve of three-quarters of a million pounds? Not only were we without the backing of an established business, but capital on anything like a generous scale was wholly lacking. We had neither machinery nor building of our own; indeed, apart from the limited amount of money subscribed, and that rather hazy asset, our own wealth of optimism, we had precious little of the requirements regarded as indispensable to-day. Yet, as between success and failure, it was always a near thing.

Only by the meagre sum of £152, not more than the price of a few columns of advertising space, did we fail to balance accounts in the last week of our existence. A guaranteed page advertisement a day would have saved us. Reckoning the results achieved, the total amount of money spent on the *Evening Times* from first to last was absurdly small. When all our own efforts were

exhausted a little more money quickly found, would, I am certain, have given the paper the necessary breathing space to turn the corner. Where to get the money from was a problem we failed to solve. The advisers of Captain J. A. Morrison, then M.P. for East Nottingham, who was our chief financial backer, did not feel justified in recommending him to subscribe any further capital and while the decision was heart-breaking we had no ground for complaint, seeing that he had carried out all his promises.

The attitude of most capitalists we approached was much on a par with that of Sir Edward Sassoon, father of the present Baronet. This generous and good-natured man, when subscribing £1,000 of the original sum raised, hinted that he never expected to see his money again. That being the state of mind of one rich man before the new evening paper had actually started, imagine the attitude of other millionaires, hard as nails in business, when invited to find funds for a paper that had been going for over a year and still was not paying! One and all took the view that they must inevitably lose their money, or that they were being invited to enter blindly into a complicated business which they did not understand, and were never likely to understand. Who is going to attempt the almost hopeless task of persuading people, not born and bred in the newspaper business, that a paper may be losing money and yet be a potential success?

An effort to convince Lord Beaverbrook that existing figures were no criterion of a paper's ultimate possibilities succeeded, but how many men of his type are there about? In any case we tried Lord Beaverbrook ourselves, and though he was not to come to our rescue, he did turn newspaper capitalist, vindicating by his success with the *Daily Express* the belief we shared—that a paper on the right lines, granted patience and pocket are large enough, must eventually triumph.

That Watney ever got together the initial capital to compete, even for a time, with papers of the standing of the *Evening News* and the *Star* was more of a romance than the actual life of the *Evening Times*, which towards the end smacked of painful tragedy. Who of the outside public to-day would, under similar circumstances, trust a combination of journalists, not themselves capitalists?

For the mechanical production of the paper we relied on the *Daily Express*, the management of which, to suit our publishing requirements, altered the building to open out into St. Bride Street. Had we surmounted our difficulties, we should have

benefited by the improvements which Lord Beaverbrook introduced into the *Express* machine-room. But while perfection in printing would most certainly have eased our problem, I doubt whether it would have had much bearing on our fate, seeing that this was determined not by mechanical defects, but by lack of money.

While we lasted the sluggish waters of Fleet Street received a much-needed stir-up, for until our advent papers were closing down rather than starting up; nor, as we ran our fitful course, could the other "evenings" complain of any lack of excitement. All their ingenuity was strained to meet the more elastic methods which our smaller sale permitted. Having nothing to gain by conforming to the settled hours of publication, we were constantly advancing our publishing times. We arranged for our so-called 6.30 p.m. edition to be on the streets long before our rivals, with the result that some of their early editions were squeezed out. Rival publishers found that the public did not stop to inquire whether the news in their own four o'clock edition was the equivalent of that in our 6.30 p.m. The later seal, if not the later paper, caught the chance sale.

The early hour at which our late editions made their appearance was responsible for at least one joke. It was remarked that there had been a devil of a row because the 6.30 p.m. *Evening Times* had missed the 12.45 midday connection to Brighton.

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I have said that the *Evening Times* did not deserve to die. There are Fleet Street men who, remembering its existence, will be generous enough to endorse that verdict. I have lived to see many of the ideas we introduced permanently incorporated into modern journalism. The theatrical column entitled, "Heard in the Green-room," was the origin of the regular feature now carried by most evening papers, although it has to be remembered that every form of gossip column has a common ancestry in the lively compendium of chit-chat known as *Modern Society*, which used to entertain and intrigue our not always sedate grandmothers. Edgar Wallace's racing page marked a distinctive departure in modern journalism, and of the bright stunts he popularised punters still talk with delight of "Clever Mike," whose daily facetiousness often provided a long-odds winner. Watney's diplomatic scoops, partially wasted on an evening paper of our restricted importance, were quoted the world over, and occasionally caused a tremendous flutter in the dove-cotes of the *Quai d'Orsay* and the *Wilhelmstrasse*. It was Watney, who sooner than

any other journalist, appreciated the ability of Stephen Graham, for when brought on to the *Evening Times* to contribute vignettes of London life, this clever novelist and historian was practically unknown.

In the ordinary news of the day the *Evening Times* was most lucky, and considering the amount of money at the paper's disposal the number of its sensational news feats was quite astonishing. After a run of particularly bright "scoops" on our part, we heard that the staff on another London paper had been severely admonished for not showing the same enterprise. Said the particular Editor, "Here you have a one-eyed paper, without a bob in the world, and with only half a staff, and that on quarter salaries, licking the stuffing out of everybody in Fleet Street. You, who are well fed and well paid, what do you do in comparison? Go to it, or there will be a lot of missing faces in the office."

The mistakes we made, which were not few, included "Crippen's Confession." Bought from a source thought to be unquestionable, the confession represented the sense of actual words used by the murderer some time before his execution. It was not a confession made by Crippen in the last hour of his life. If this be the understood definition of "a confession," then the *Evening Times* could fairly be accused of what in political jargon is known as "a terminological inexactitude." On the other hand, if a confession need not be limited to a particular place or day, and can be made any time between arrest and execution, then the *Evening Times'* description of its matter was strictly true.

We were asked to pay the sum of £1,000 for the confession; actually we paid £500. Edgar Wallace, with the exception of the Editor the most experienced journalist on the staff, undertook to handle the matter, and if he had omitted seven or eight words at the most, what we printed could not have been challenged.

While the *Evening Times* was selling on Crippen's confession, the other "evenings" were countering with "Crippen: no confession."

A negative bill does not sell evening papers like a positive bill, and throughout the day we sold like the proverbial hot-cakes. The demand assumed such dimensions that we had to keep the printing machines running, with scarcely a stop for a change of plates to admit the latest racing results.

By disclosing the source of our information we could easily have established our bona-fides, but we were in honour bound not to divulge names. For a few weeks the reaction was adverse,

yet, popular memory being short, the evil effects of the "Crippen Confession" as regards sales gradually wore off. Indeed, we were picking up nicely when far greater misfortune overtook the paper—the refusal of the principal financial supporter to place any more money at our disposal. In the emergency, Cowley, with magnificent pluck which I shall never cease to admire, proposed financing the paper himself, until such time, at any rate, as a prominent capitalist could be induced to shoulder the burden. To give the search for the moneyed man as long a period as possible, expenditure, already low, was still more drastically pruned, and the loss reduced to manageable proportions. Many members of the staff agreed to take fractional salaries, the difference being made up in shares, which if we had succeeded would eventually have been a valuable consideration.

My own salary was dropped to £4 a week, and to keep my mind from dwelling overmuch on my hard-up condition my work was quadrupled. In addition to being news-editor, I acted as chief sub-editor, reporter, make-up man, and serial-story writer. In the train between Fenchurch Street and Westcliff, where for cheapness' sake I had gone to live, I wrote the leader-page articles.

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There was no over-matter, for the simple reason that as soon as the paper neared fullness I boiled everything down, and running over to the printers killed in the raw copy state all that stood no chance of getting in. There was no over-matter for another good reason ; we had no money to pay for waste. When you are living on £4 a week, the fancy for seeing pounds sucked up in endless extravagance, such as over-matter, leaves you for ever. Of course on a wealthy paper it is different. A substantial allowance for over-matter permits you to produce the effect of greater variety and choice. No elasticity of choice was left to me. The paper had to be produced at the minimum of cost, and for cheapness' sake I made the fullest possible use of my own energies. The amount of work I did for £4 a week would astonish friends of mine in Fleet Street, who can never imagine that, granted certain circumstances, I am prepared to be a fantastic philanthropist.

For some weeks we struggled on in this starved fashion, encouraged to receive a cheque for £1,000 from Alfred de Rothschild, who, on hearing of our plight, with the characteristic kindness of heart of his family sent along this offering,—an inducement to us to persevere with our efforts and so save a great number



of people from being thrown out of employment. Further, to cheer us up, Cowley persuaded Lord Beaverbrook to take a week's option on the paper, for which privilege he paid £500. He was hesitating then between taking us over and buying the control of the *Daily Express* on whose machines we were printed. That in the end he should drop us and concentrate on the *Express* was not, in my opinion, the shrewdest procedure. He should have saved the *Evening Times*, and then turned to the *Express*, which in due course would have fallen right into his lap. For little more than the price of one paper he would have had a popular "evening" and a popular "morning," and the history of the *Evening Standard* would have followed a different course. The point that matters is that he did not save the *Evening Times*; we were left to sink.

To the last Sir Samuel Scott, like the great sportsman he is, took an interest both in us and our doings, and when the paper had foundered, held out a helping hand to such members of the staff as required assistance. Of all the directors not actually on the working staff he was the most sympathetic, and his advice the most useful. Lord Winterton promised to be a most vigorous director, but he was appointed too late to give us the full benefit of his forceful services. I remember his rising at one protracted Board Meeting and exclaiming to a voluble talker from outside, "Stop this fooling, please." He reminded me of Campbell-Bannerman rebuking the subtle-witted Balfour across the floor of the House for over-provocative verbosity.

To watch a newspaper die on which unstinted enthusiasm and energy have been lavished is a heart-rending experience which no journalist ever wants to see repeated. Yet the last moments of a newspaper, the manner in which it flickers out, are dreadfully simple. The machines stop and the men clean up, cracking meanwhile a few hollow jokes to disguise their real emotions; some members of the staff, loath to leave, wander aimlessly round the rooms, opening and shutting drawers as if expecting to find gold hidden there; an occasional shout of, "Who's for a cup of coffee?" breaks the anguished silence, and it is a relief, in response, to hear the sound of moving feet. One by one familiar faces drift into the street, to be seen by their fellows no more; the commissioner puts on his overcoat and hat, turns out the electric light, first at the switches and then at the main; fastens the front door, tries the lock to make sure the place is secure; looks round for the last time, as though awaiting a surprise message that he is wanted; lights his pipe, heaves a dull sigh, steps out on to the pavement, and all is over. Somebody more sentimental than the rest comes back to take a final look at the deserted building,

mortuary of futile labour, frustrated ambition and blighted hopes, and in that look senses all the loneliness and misery which belong to failure.

As I trudged my melancholy way towards Fenchurch Street station, *en route* for Westcliff, my thoughts were as weary as my steps. A thing possessed of life, character and heart, representing the work of many minds shaped into a distinct unity, had suddenly ceased, and though one's soul rebelled against the desolating and capricious verdict of fate, there was no chance of undoing it. A sigh or two, a muttered regret or two, a kindly word or two, a jeer or two—and the poor dead paper would drop out of the world's thoughts, and with it some part of my own life. Fleet Street I knew would go on exactly the same, as though the paper that had died had never been.

As the machines stopped Cowley's words to me were, "Well, Falk, that's the end of the *Evening Times*." There was little use in saying more. The situation called not for words, but for tears. How dare Cowley trust himself to speak all that was in his heart, he who had lost a fortune in the vain effort to save the paper? What added poignancy to our feelings was the maddening knowledge, that the very hour we closed down was the nearest we ever came to success. As I have said, the difference between recording a loss and making a profit had been narrowed down to £152, a matter of selling a few more columns of daily advertising space.

I am not generally an emotional character, but when I glanced round the emptying office and reminded myself I was seeing the last of the second paper of which I had been a proprietor, I felt just like sinking on the floor and having a good weep.

Seven years older than when I entered Fleet Street, after working day and night with what I might well describe as unabated fury, I found myself poorer than ever in health, prospects and personal possessions. True, I had gained in knowledge which one day might prove useful, but I had yet to put it to the test. Meanwhile the mordant words of Alfred de Musset were ringing in my brain, "Experience is good, providing it does not kill you."

As I had made two attempts to establish a paper and each time failed, Fleet Street could hardly be blamed for concluding that I had more audacity than ability. "Results tell" is a rough-and-ready yard-measure of capacity with which one ought not to quarrel; yet to know the whole of my story is to forbid too harsh a verdict on my experiments.

Other papers may have openly condemned our efforts as unworthy of success, but that privately they held different views was shown in the extraordinary rush to recruit the dispersed members of the staff. I have no desire to produce a catalogue supporting my argument ; a few typical instances will serve. Largely at the instigation of Lord Rothermere, with whom he had always remained on the most friendly terms, Cowley went back into the Harmsworth employ, and, thanks to the openings provided him, and to his special gift of getting twelve pennies out of a shilling, he rose to be chairman of the *Daily Mirror* Company, one of the biggest newspaper enterprises in the country. Wallace fell back on novel writing, and became the world's best-seller ; Watney returned to political and diplomatic journalism and quickly re-established himself in the forefront ; Trevor Wignall, our boxing man, took up the same position on the *Daily Mail*, prior to joining the *Daily Express* ; Arthur Findon ran a successful competition paper, flourished on the *Sunday Dispatch* and finally became Editor of the *Leader* ; Frank L. Lascot passed from the reporting staff of the *Evening Times* to the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial*, to end up as publicity expert to the Berry combine ; F. V. Keighley was for a long time advertising manager of the *Sunday Dispatch* ; while S. A. Moseley, clever reporter and ingenious writer, found scope in a multitude of activities. He investigated spiritualism for the Sunday Press, wrote an astonishing number of books which sold, and played a prominent part in exploiting television. Often he was seen to be in the company of J. S. Elias, for whose papers, the *Daily Herald* and *John Bull*, he regularly wrote.

The engaging mystery that surrounds the existence of Moseley has sufficiently lifted to allow us to know that he has made four fortunes and lost three ; thus experienced he has fitted himself to produce books on the alluring subject of how to get rich. We still await from him a book conveying the equally important and logical sequel—How to keep rich. Most newspapermen of my acquaintance envy Moseley the genuine and abundant enjoyment which he derives out of life, his freedom to travel at will the wide world over, and, not least, the possession in superlative measure of the temper to assess at their true value the fleeting triumphs of Fleet Street.

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That to have been on the *Evening Times* should be regarded as a first-class recommendation was undoubted proof of the idiscrimination shown in choosing the original staff. Nothing

affected the enthusiasm of these fine fellows. They worked as well for little as for big money, big in this respect being a comparative term, for salaries on the *Evening Times* were always remarkably small, and on no other paper were such long hours kept. Yet the earliest riser could not compete with Watney, the Editor. To be in the office at 7 a.m. was no guarantee that you would anticipate his arrival. More often than not you found him already hard at work, a bundle of written copy by his elbow ready for the printer to handle. Whether he ever slept was a problem to which, less pressed for time, I should certainly have devoted more attention. While we lived near one another, I was always in dread of a 6 a.m. visit from him, 6 a.m. being the bewitching hour when Watney felt like discussing the news of the day, whereas I, being of commoner clay, felt like stealing another sixty minutes' rest.

Watney kept up the old *Daily Mail* habit of sending members of the staff letters specially prepaid so as to ensure delivery first thing in the morning, and the postman's 6 a.m. rat-a-tat at the door was the signal that the expected and *dreaded* letter from the Editor had arrived. It was owing to the early hours' habit which Watney inculcated in the staff that, when the famous Sidney Street siege broke out, we had a full complement of reporters at hand to develop the news. I remember a stranger, his eye on a goodly reward, calling at the office at 7.30 a.m. to tell us that "Hell had broken loose," and how, after piecing the facts together, we chased everybody in the office down to the East End. That particular day we changed the headlines and the introduction to the Sidney Street story roughly about every twenty minutes. I know that no sooner had we settled on a startling headline than the action dramatically altered, which meant that before the edition could go to press an even more sensational development had to be featured.

Though the history of the *Evening Times* hinges on the sombre, there were not absent amusing interludes. For the transmission of copy between the editorial building on one side of St. Bride Street and the composing room on the other side, we ran a pneumatic underground tube. Warning for the fiftieth time an inveterate offender that he wrote too much, I put his stuff into the tube and dismissed it from my mind. When later I inquired about the copy, the printer swore he had not received it. Too late for use we unearthed the missing matter from the tube where it had got stuck. To the complaints of the aggrieved contributor I made a savage response, saying that in the burial of

his copy he was witnessing the direct hand of God, chastising him for continual breach of the newspaper commandment, "Thou shalt write no more than thy allotted space".

Another troublesome contributor, too valuable to be "choked off" entirely, was kept on a retainer. He brought in a wad of indigestible matter which after he had gone I promptly "spiked." Next day, when he queried what had happened to his copy, I told him it had occupied the first three columns of page nine, whereat he went away hugely delighted. To this day he may still not realise that we were only an eight-page paper.

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Watney's handwriting was the subject of good-natured chaff among the compositors. Though beautiful to look upon, it was of microscopical dimensions, suggesting the minute script of those ingenious penmen who squeeze the Lord's Prayer into the space of a sixpence. Wallace had all sorts of amusing stories to tell of Watney's handwriting when they were together on the *Daily Mail*, but I would not like to vouch for their strict accuracy. He said he once received a note from Watney telling him to call upon the Mayor of a particular place. He read the address as Birmingham, and returned to find he should have gone to Bermondsey. On another occasion he took a note of Watney's to be a promised rise in salary, but the sharper eyes of the cashier read it as a warning to Wallace to keep his expenses down!

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE REAL EDGAR WALLACE

IF one needed an opportunity of studying Edgar Wallace's methods at close range, it was provided on the *Evening Times*. There one saw him in his native state, not on the imaginary heights where the flamboyant remarks of sycophantic friends placed him. When it was a case of writing ordinary copy he dictated without a break to his secretary, or reeled it off in that nice handwriting which was inclined to move away from the left-hand side of the paper to the right. But assign him a descriptive ceremonial story in which colour and purple patches were necessary, and he fell back on an entirely different procedure. He would cautiously sketch his story in outline overnight, slowly and deliberately modelling each of his purple patches, and into this colourful framework would next day fit the hard facts gathered at the actual ceremony. His copy, complete in detail and polished to the last comma, would be ready for the printers by the time the agency accounts had finished pouring in.

Whatever changes were to take place later in his methods of work, Wallace, when I was his colleague (1911-12) was not to be found pouring out descriptive matter at breakneck speed. Like everybody else he required time and thought for balanced and neat composition, and only the system of preparing the framework in advance of the event permitted him at once to be a stylist, and a journalist able to catch the edition. Ever so carefully he checked what he had written beforehand, so as not to involve either himself or the paper in ridicule. Though I was aware of the amount of preparation needed for his best descriptive work on the *Evening Times*, I admired him none the less as a most skilful and unconventional journalist, lively, versatile, and of a witty turn of mind.

There was no such person as a particular Wallace. One day you thought him most facile with his pen, the next day decidedly off-colour and dried up. In more recent years when his "copy" frequently ran short, I was never able to make out whether it was failure of inspiration or calculated intention. I stipulated with him for a series of short stories for the *Sunday Dispatch*, each to

be of a certain length, yet over and over again I had to beg him for so many more hundred words to fill the agreed space. Yet to the Wallace of popular tradition what were three or four hundred words but a trifling matter at the most of ten minutes' dictation ?

Having known Wallace from the old *Evening News* days, that is to say for nearly thirty years, I allowed myself the luxury of frank speech in his presence. He pretended to listen sympathetically to what I had to say, and even professed to be interested, but he never followed any advice I gave him. He agreed that his earlier book, *Sanders of the River*, was his best performance, but all in vain was my appeal to him to write a book that should be even better, a book shaped with some of the care, patience, and love of the perfected phrase displayed by George Moore ; a book written in a quiet room void of typewriters and dictaphones, with just himself in it, weighing up every word which he committed to paper. Whether his quick, restless brain could settle down to slow composition was a question I was never able to answer to my own satisfaction.

Rightly or wrongly, I visualised Wallace as a most gifted, fate-ridden being, consciously living up to the world's heroic but unkindly conception of himself as a tireless worker, capable of turning out with ridiculous ease a book a day ; one who never knew the meaning of fatigue or brain fag or physical weakness. They were not his friends who, by stories of his imaginative fecundity and factory-like methods, helped to swell the legend of his non-stop output. Novels, plays, articles, interviews—press a button, and like chocolates from an automatic machine they came trooping forth from Wallace's protean and inexhaustible brain. Such was the legend. Though Wallace did take long rests, he was always being tempted to live up to the part of the man who found work easy. His real friends, unpleasantly truthful people, were those who suggested that by limiting his output to more highly finished work he would consult his best interests. This course would not have meant a reduced income. As his writings became less prolific, so, proportionately, would his price have gone up. The abundant supply of novels, stories and articles which was always available prevented Wallace from obtaining the highest return. Had his output been small, many a newspaper concern would gladly have paid him £100 for a short story, instead of only £50. From a business, as well as an artistic, point of view Wallace's wisest policy was to have strictly limited his production.

How I dreaded the endless tax on that ingenious brain, which the excessive cigarette habit can have done little to lighten ! How earnestly I wished he might be persuaded to slacken down the endless grind ! Here at his best was a sensitive artist, with an instinctive feeling for style and the beauty of the English language, loving well-balanced sentences and pleasant-sounding words, and the phrase that runs crisp-like and sparkling from an unhurried pen ; a writer clever in all branches of journalism and literary work. Such a one should not have talked lightly of writing a book a day, a book a week, or a book a month ; he should not, year after year, have coaxed millions of words out of a willing but still human brain. Shrewd in many ways of the world, he should have been shrewd in these three most vital respects : he should have known that even the most facile brain-worker with the strongest imaginable constitution cannot safely undergo more than a certain strain ; he should have realised that lasting renown is founded on quality rather than on quantity ; finally, he should have understood that to win both fame and wealth called in his case for far less prodigious toil.

Withal I would wish to pay the respect of a friend and admirer to the memory of the most remarkable purveyor of readable matter this generation has had the good fortune to know ; one who took the strange road destiny intended for him with a gift of language and style at his command which, if properly used, might have made him a greater George Moore—greater because, unlike that other artist in words, he would always have been part of the human stream, not isolated in a cloistered study.

So great an authority as Wallace on the methods, real and imaginary, of the criminal classes could not afford to fall short of complete enlightenment. With great honesty he would say that he had seen everything in the underworld that there was to be seen. A fellow-journalist, anxious to test the extent of his knowledge, asked Edgar whether he had been present at an English execution. The answer was "Yes." The opportunity had occurred in the provinces. While his companion stood and listened, Wallace went on to describe the haunting scene : the light of the murderer's last morning on earth stealing from under the door of the condemned cell ; the hoarse whisper of the under-sheriff, "The chaplain is now praying with him" ; the grim procession to the scaffold, under-sheriff, chaplain and himself following behind with slow, measured tread ; the placing of the pinioned man on the scaffold ; the curious noise made by the drawing of the lever ; the drop of the head-shrouded convict into



the pit below. While listening to Wallace, the other scribe had to pinch himself to be sure that he was not watching a sensational Hollywood film, so realistically was every detail in the last act of a condemned man's life pictured by that vivid, projecting imagination. It was the journalist in Edgar that gave much of his work its picturesque realism. How fiction and actual knowledge can be combined to the greatest advantage by the skilful writer we are taught by the successful novels of H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley and Feuchtwanger.

Captain Morrison, our chief financial supporter, was one to delight the Victorian novelist in search of an original character. Though mostly accessible and quite easy in his manner, he had the reputation of rarely opening a letter or a telegram, a precaution we assumed to be peculiar to millionaires, no doubt pestered out of their lives by countless begging letter-writers or by people with the usual "fine business proposition." He had a tantalising habit of continually changing his address, so that from one week to another it was always a problem where to find him. Even those who were supposed to be in constant touch with him had frequently to confess ignorance of his whereabouts. On one occasion, after hunting high and low for the gentleman, we eventually tracked him down to Norway, where he was salmon fishing!

There was a man in the office who looked exactly like him. "You must have a sovereign for that," said Captain Morrison, apparently pleased at the striking resemblance. Thereafter one noticed a suspicious predominance in the office of Morrison moustachios and Morrison bowlers.

He was always nervous about not being able to secure a taxicab. He had been kept waiting once, he confessed, as long as ten minutes, and time to him was more valuable than a few shillings on a taxi-meter. Whenever he drove up to the office we had strict orders to detain the taxicab, irrespective of the length of the wait. At Board meetings Captain Morrison provided us with magnificent cigars, specially secured from a well-known firm near the Royal Exchange, a trifle to one who had inherited the Morrison millions, and was credited with being enriched to the tune of hundreds of thousands whenever a rich relative died, and he could be induced to open a black-edged envelope. A likeable man and a "great card." What a pity that his faith in us did not last a little longer! Then the *Evening Times* would not have died; his investment, instead of being a complete loss, would have been a substantial contribution to his mounting fortune, and he would have finished up a leading newspaper proprietor.

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In the ruins of the *Evening Times* there perished a tall silk hat. It belonged to Laurence Vine, the barrister, then a reporter on the staff. He kept the hat at the office so that he might be appropriately attired for weddings or funerals. After being out all one day on a story, he returned to find the office shut. Through the windows he could see his tall hat in its cardboard box, resting on the usual shelf. The snag was that no one was there to open the doors to him. Never again did he clap eyes on the hat ; yet so late as 1933, or when more than ten years had elapsed, he would sadly remember its disappearance, and meeting me in the street would wistfully inquire whether I had any information as to its ultimate fate. Poor silk hat that had done no wrong !

## CHAPTER XIV

### TRIAL BY SONG

**A**FTER the twofold disaster which had befallen me, the collapse of *The Week-end* and the failure of the *Evening Times*, any tendency on my part to become morbid was corrected by the knowledge that to be in Fleet Street without money, and without a job, was to face a situation which dalliance with the soul's dark night was only likely to make worse. The more cheerful I remained, the better chance I had of retrieving my position. So, putting on my best smile, I quickly looked around for a corner of refuge and found it in the *Daily Express* office. R. D. Blumenfeld, the Editor,<sup>1</sup> with an unmistakable desire to be helpful for which I shall ever do him honour, made a place for me on the sub-editors' table. The unconventional atmosphere of the *Express* had always appealed to my particular temperament. At last, born out of adversity, had come the opportunity of being associated with this bright paper. But while I was preparing to join the noble band of sub-editors, the gods were arranging for me to go elsewhere. Sir Henry Dalziel, afterwards Lord Dalziel,<sup>2</sup> met Cowley in the street, and remembering the dispersed *Evening Times* staff mentioned that he was on the look-out for an editor. "Falk's your man," replied Cowley. Not wishing to stand in my way, Blumenfeld released me, and I joined *Reynolds's*, serving faithfully the term of my agreement. Long after I had left, Lord Dalziel was generous enough to say that it was a pity we had drifted apart; yet I am as convinced now, as I was then, that I was totally unsuited to the special character and requirements of the celebrated Radical organ. The rigid old-fashioned canons of the paper, rightly preserved in those days; the policy of expenditure reduced to the bone, of which while on the *Evening Times* I had already digested more than was palatable, and the close surveillance of the proprietor, who with his infinitely superior political endowment and experience stood out as the natural and legitimate editor—all made me realise that whatever vicissitudes or strokes of luck awaited me in Fleet Street, here, certainly,

<sup>1</sup> Since retired.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Dalziel died in the summer of 1936.

I had not come into my kingdom. I sighed to think how much more comfortable, even though the pay had been less, I would have been in the *Express* building where the ways of life were expansive and amusing.

Yet the kindness to be found on all sides in the strange community of workers which *Reynolds's* supported made me view my eventual departure with intense regret. Tommy Carter, the manager, had a pleasing wit; Moorhouse, the printer, while condemning me for being too fussy, listened patiently to my regular tale of the marvellous mechanical equipment of Carmelite House, the while he fed me with tea and biscuits, which from regarding as a gift I came to look upon as an editor's perquisite. Other characters in the office playing minor parts made me forget that I was in an office of solemn traditions, such a rich fund of Cockney humour enlivened my contacts with them. In the late E. C. Buley, the chief sub-editor (like myself one of the numerous ex-editors of the *Sunday Dispatch*), I recognised an old friend who had known me from my earliest days in London. I was then a reporter on the *Evening News*, and he a writer of "specials" on the *Daily Mirror*. With a devotion to duty that excited my pity as well as my admiration, Buley turned out reams of the matter for which the columns of *Reynolds's* ached, and although faithful to my appointment as Editor I never ventured to express compassion, yet often I knew that much of the "copy," to quote his own phrase, gave him "a pain in the neck." Nothing ever depressed Buley for long. If he felt in the least inclined towards "the blues", he had only to look at the day's runners to pick out a "double" whose success would keep us all merrily excited. A shilling or two on some rank outsider was worth losing for the pleasurable thrills it produced, and when the outsider came home what millionaire felt happier than the humble punters of Temple Avenue! It was then I learnt of the stealthy folk who live mysterious lives in the twilight of buried courts and alleys, and are curiously attached to small slips of paper inscribed with memorable names.

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Of the entertaining people on *Reynolds's* who helped to make my existence palatable, I must not overlook Gerard Martin who lent Buley a hand on the desk. Like W. G. Fish, a former Editor of the *Daily Mail*, Martin had the gift of mimicry developed in him to a high degree. Nobody else in Fleet Street, merely by the art of intonation and gesture, can make a person discussed live before you to anything like the same degree. Having served

with the Army of Occupation in Cologne, Martin thought he would take up business. Noticing the huge fortunes made by demobbed men who bought and sold goods in Germany, he wondered whether luck would serve him the same. For a while he did well, then things became awkward, and the call of journalism proving once more potent he returned to London, which meant a lively and amusing personality restored to the life of *Reynolds's*.

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While with Lord Dalziel's paper I was unduly sensitive to possible ridicule, particularly terrified of making a "bloomer" over the popular song we ran each week. The inflexible order was that the name of the song should appear at the foot of every contents bill we issued. I know I had to scrap two excellent bills to avoid what I considered an obvious misfit. With my future so little assured, it would never have done, thought I, for two bills with the following combination to be on the Sunday streets :

*Reynolds's Newspaper*

*Reynolds's Newspaper*

**KIDNAPPED GIRL'S** |

**ASSASSINATION**

**FULL STORY** |

**OF THE**

**KING OF GREECE**

**"Who were You With  
Last Night?"**

**"Meet Me To-night in  
Dreamland."**

It must have been a great relief to Lord Dalziel, who had long ceased to be interested in frivolous persons, when I took my leave.

Occasionally a policeman conducting the traffic in a West End street salutes me as I go by, and my smile of recognition is for one who left the staff of *Reynolds's* to take over the more exciting responsibility of helping to keep the peace.

## CHAPTER XV

### SCRIBBLING TO LIVE

LEAVING *Reynolds's* I straightaway stepped into an office in Fleet Street which I had previously prepared, engaged an expert typist with a smile, nice teeth, and the ability to forget my irritable remarks, and once again hung out my plate as a free-lance. As I was now hardened to knocks, the prospect of further testing my wits in this uncertain field no longer frightened me. On the contrary I was conscious of a sense of freedom and adventure which, after being cooped up, I found exhilarating. All said and done, in order to live I did not require to earn an extravagant amount. My habits were frugal and temperate, largely disciplined by misfortune, and the simplicity which was the note of my own existence extended, I am thankful to say, to my home surroundings. When one is a free-lance, quite as important a consideration as what you earn, is what you spend.

Regularly I worked from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Long after the typist had gone I would be still scribbling away for dear life, and even on a Saturday I was reluctant to cut down my working hours. In the winter, my two rooms being on the top floor, I felt the cold intensely ; unless there was a blazing coal-fire I could not collect my thoughts. Unfortunately the fire-place was in the back room, and I had to choose between natural daylight and shivering, and artificial light and being warm, for the electric fire that had been fitted in the front and much lighter room was not powerful enough to satisfy my needs. This may seem a trifling point to emphasise, but personal experience will confirm its importance. Let the free-lance who smiles at my statement try writing in a cold room, and see how much work he gets done.

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I strove to systematise my activity. Whenever possible I tried to reserve the morning for gathering information, and the afternoon for writing up the facts and opinions I had gleaned. I soon learned that people seen before lunch were much better subjects for interviewing than after. While a substantial meal

increased the average flow of good temper, it more than neutralised any such benefits by inducing lethargy and the indolent state of mind which recoils from any task requiring concentration.

After a month's hard practice at dictation on the typewriter, I was capable of turning out workmanlike and readable articles at the rate of a thousand words an hour, though the manuscripts might require a number of small revisions to give them finish and polish. Ninety-nine per cent of what I wrote I sold within forty-eight hours. Almost wholly I confined myself to commissioned work, based on a list of suggestions regularly submitted to different editors. Necessity encouraged an abundance of ideas. To deny that I was other than happy and ingenious in the notions I struck would be false modesty on my part. And I am not built that way.

I was not yet thirty and my brain functioned sufficiently well to give me an excellent free-lance connection. Though I had all the work I could hope to execute, yet there was nothing remarkable in my methods and application. Industry and punctuality in the delivery of copy, as well as the active use of such wits as God had given me, enabled me to produce the catchy little articles and tricky interviews which the periodicals of the day invited. A smile on your face, a laugh in your heart, and a willingness to work—armed with these recommendations you should, when you are young, always pick up a fair living in Fleet Street; unless, of course, you are that hopeless exception, a mental case.

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I specialised in signed contributions by well-known people. Celebrity series were the easiest to sell, though the hardest to get, and restrained by no exalted ideas of my destiny I thrived exceedingly. The class of work in which I specialised brought me numerous sneers from superior friends. Since they did nothing to help me, I did not give a fig for their opinion, and went on making a useful income.

All was good fish that came into my net. I took the line of least resistance. That editors required articles by well-known people was enough. I wasted no time in questioning the propriety of this class of journalism. Persons who answered the wanted description became my quarry. If, when celebrity hunting, I frequently drew blanks, more often I scored; so I supported my family and continued to pay twenty shillings in the pound, acquiring in the rough and tumble a face like brass and a hide like a rhinoceros which no jeers or flouts or rebuffs could penetrate or wound.

An article written by myself might have more engaging contents, but measured against a signed contribution by a famous boxer, stage star, popular M.P., etc., it did not stand a ghost of a chance of acceptance. I was not a Don Quixote; I fought no wind-mills; if anything I went round with them. Noble gestures were not regarded at my particular bank as the equivalent of cash.

My easiest catches were among the theatrical profession. In those days stage folk were just as anxious to see their names in print as I was to oblige them. Unspoilt by four-figure offers for their reminiscences, "stars" had not become disconcertingly businesslike.

At the top of her fame, Gaby Deslys, the dancer, was a first-class talking feature for any of the popular weeklies. While appreciating the value of publicity, she was too shrewd to make herself accessible to every copy-hunter. I succeeded because of my perfect frankness and, I suppose, because of my perseverance and good temper. Always interested in money, the fair lady was anxious to know how much I received for each article I extracted from her. Was it as much as £100? I laughed so heartily as to make her think for a moment that I was going out of my mind. I told her that I received exactly five guineas, and in support of my statement actually produced some of the cheques, on the back of which had been written what they were payment for. The first time Gaby looked frightfully shocked, pouted her pretty lip, made a wry grimace with her mouth, and said something in the French argot to her mother, who was helping with the "make-up." Then, turning to me, an expression of incredulity on her face, she exclaimed, "But, m'sieu, you are not serious. Five guineas is nothing; it is not even a pair of silk stockings." I agreed, but pointed out that journalists placed in my position took what they could get. There was an eloquent pause for contemplation, during which certain bewitchments were performed on her face and hair, after which she went on. "M'sieu, mine is a good name for the papers. I know, because of the many who come here asking I shall give them interviews. If you are hard, not what you call 'soft,' you will receive more." (I do my best to repeat her fascinating English.)

While grateful to the dancer for her righteous indignation on my behalf, I assured her, once more, that I could not hope for any larger sum than five guineas. That was all the papers I worked for would pay. Some animated conversation followed and the



question of money was dropped. She was more concerned that I should not write anything to do her harm. She was tired of "bad lies"; they made her sick. So we made a compact, faithfully kept on my part: the things she told me I would turn into a form suitable for publication. What was printed should be good, healthy publicity for her, as well as good selling copy for the papers who bought my wares.

When I discussed dress with Gaby I was shown the fifteen guineas a pair cobwebby silk stockings, specially procured to her order by a famous London stores; when we talked jewellery I was allowed to inspect the huge pearls round her neck, too large in my opinion to be beautiful. "I sleep with them," she remarked, "then I am quite sure they are safe. If in the night I suddenly awake, I like to feel they are around my neck." The enormous pearl ear-rings and the rings on her fingers to match—gifts of a Continental king who did not long survive her—had ceased to please Gaby. She felt they were a nuisance, and had better have been turned into good, solid francs.

On hearing the subject of a proposed article, "Love," Gaby burst forth into a violent, emotional tirade. "Lov," she repeated after me, with bitter intonation in her voice, "Lov!—pouf!" Turning to her dresser she pointed significantly at me, and in her unforgettable foreign accent exclaimed, "He speaks of lov!" I saw a vicious gleam enter that bold eye, a disdainful smile surl in the corners of that pretty mouth. Then, "To you, M'sieu, I say again, 'pouf'! What you speak, lov? Non! Non! Gaby say, 'Ze monee, ze monee.'" She was so angry that she would not talk to me any more, and no article came from her that day. As I walked away, thinking of the bitter disillusionment underlying her broken answer, I wondered what miserable memories had prompted the revealing outburst. Poor, spoilt, cruelly used favourite of fortune who would die young!—how little did the world know of her innermost thoughts, or what came from her lips, when sunk on her knees in the little oratory built into her house at Kensington Gore she told the secrets of her soul to The Maker-of-All!

Was Gaby Deslys good-looking? By classical standards, no. Her features were too ill-defined to earn her high praise, and absence of refinement militated against the suggestion of superlative charm. Yet in that baby face, soft velvety skin, adorable complexion and caressing eyes lurked endless variety and attrac-

tion. She had the expression of a born enchantress. You looked at her and felt that she was made to be admired, petted, and have the world's richest lovers at her feet. Dressed for a lunch-call in black, clinging velvet that set off to perfection her attractive form, Gaby looked radiant. Her clothes fitted so precisely as to give the impression of having been moulded to her figure. Than the black velvet priest's hat she favoured nothing could have sat more daintily on her impudent head. From under the brim golden tresses purposefully strayed, but I did not think their glint owed so much to nature as to art ; nor was I enamoured of the timbre of her voice which came hoarse out of a husky throat.

Each time I saw Gaby Deslys I felt that I was gazing at a woman surfeited with the good things of life, a bitter cynic as regards human nature, of which, if she had seen the best, she must also have seen the worst. Her will, leaving most of her considerable fortune to the poor of Marseilles, was the act of a woman who wanted to be at peace with the next world. To leave her money to charity, would, she felt, help to obtain her forgiveness for her worldly trespasses. Over and over again, remembering her will, she murmured to those around her deathbed—"I danced for the poor ; I danced for the poor."

Harry Pilcer, her dancing partner, to whom she left a legacy, declared that she made over her wealth to the poor after he had declined to marry her. Affluence surpassing her wildest dreams, as well as other handsome favours of fortune, came her way. Yet fate ordained that she should be robbed of the only things to which in the end she attached value—wholehearted love and good health. What meaning had the largest pearl and the fattest bank balance for one who saw no love in her life, and all day and all night was haunted by the thought that death was ever lurking in her tired throat ? If we may call any part of her little hour one of glory, which is a big word to use, then it is true of her to say, as in Sir Philip Sidney's courtly phrase, "glory did help little to the happiness of life."

Many of the people I had to interview lived or lunched at the Savoy Hotel. In my frequent visits I stumbled across the Duke of Orleans, whose entourage would never allow him to forget his claims to the throne of France. Like most Frenchmen he despised the Kaiser, regarding him merely as an aggrandised tradesman. In my presence he recalled a visit that Wilhelm had paid him at Corfu—or was it Palermo ?—when, on being shown through the extensive orchards, the Kaiser insisted on knowing

whether they paid for the money and trouble expended on them. "Do you get a good price for your fruit?" was one of his most persistent questions. The Duke answered him politely enough, but ever afterwards he had nothing but contempt for the commercially-minded Emperor.

## CHAPTER XVI

### IN MARBLE HALLS

AS a variant to articles by well-known people in the theatrical and sporting world, editors began asking me for articles bearing aristocratic names. American as well as English periodicals competed in this snobbery, and I am afraid that across the Atlantic went many an article signed by a peer, whose views like himself were not of the least importance. Whatever sins may be placed to my account I never transgressed in this respect. If I ransacked the British peerage for articles, I did it with discrimination. No editor could ever say that I planted a "dud" on him.

*I have been faithful to thee, Cynara ! in my fashion.*

On the other hand, I would not care to be thought hard on the poor fellows who, glad enough to get any signed contribution, did not stop to argue whether the catch was a pike or a minnow, so long as the title was authentic. Hardship in Fleet Street is apt to blunt one's finer sensibilities, and if I never resorted to the practice of selling to unsuspecting editors the chatterings of titled nonentities, of whom a surprising number were, and are still, about, there is no telling what I might have done, had the necessity arose. Comparative prosperity kept me on the side of the angels. I was not naturally a saint.

. . . . .

Although it was a ludicrous arrangement, I had to consent to being paid for my contributions on a scale graduated to rank. A marquis enriched me more than an ordinary peer ; in my market a duke carried a larger fee than an earl. Dukes I looked upon as tough propositions, and mostly left them to journalists of greater courage and hopefulness. I preferred to burrow among those with less imposing heraldic quarterings.

So many hours did I spend in Mayfair or Belgravia, so often was I a visitor at the mansions of the titled great, that those who were unaware I went home to sleep might easily have mistaken

me for one indigenous to these exclusive circles. A time came when my top hat and morning coat became as familiar accessories of the aristocratic landscape as the crossing-sweeper's broom.

An American editor, who was a considerable buyer of my wares, wondered how I managed to persuade such a large number of grand people, whose aloofness was proverbial, to favour me with articles. I warned him that I had no revelations to make, indeed that what I had to say would sound so bald and unconvincing as to be almost unbelievable. The very simplicity of my explanation was a hindrance to its ready acceptance. I said that knowing where the peers lived or rather clustered together, I divided them into streets, which I systematically combed. If the odd numbers failed me, I tried the even numbers, continuing the pursuit until a satisfactory percentage of favourable replies had been won. I began with the odd numbers first, because I took my cue from Shakespeare :—

Good luck lies in odd numbers . . . they say there is a divinity in odd numbers, either in nativity, chance or death.

Shakespeare or not, it was a tremendous gamble ; very much like picking out winners with a pin, but perseverance triumphed in the end. Supposed method, strategy and cunning application, every imagined wile and device, all boiled down to the crude process of exhausting Debrett.

Presented with the unadulterated facts my American friend smiled, and while not exactly insinuating I was a liar, being too much of a gentleman for that, delicately hinted that I handled the truth carelessly. He was quite wrong. I had not deceived him, even though my phrasing might have suggested I was being facetious. To have gone into detail would have been to tell him that I kept in my desk a shrewdly selected list of "probables," and either by telephone or by letter tried them out in batches. Some were agreeable to seeing me ; others were quite the reverse, and turned me down flat. Where I scored was in the essential kindness of human nature. The proportion of peers ready to oblige was always large enough to repay my efforts and to vindicate the persuasive note in my approaches. Who had thought that, out of sheer goodness of heart, so many bearers of aristocratic names would be willing to devote the time and the thought required for articles, by which I alone was to benefit ? Could I be blamed for considering that a new interpretation had been given to the saying, *noblesse oblige* ?

To oblige a poor devil of a journalist, who stuck to them like

glue, my aristocratic patrons put themselves to endless trouble. There was no gain in the transaction for themselves. Even vanity could not be suspected, for had I not of my own volition sent them copies of the papers in which their articles appeared, they would have been denied even the simple satisfaction of seeing themselves in print. As to ninety per cent the articles were good and well turned, and did the illustrious names they bore no disservice. Frankly I was astonished at the variety and originality of the views expressed. Though frequently I offered to assist in the writing, that is to say, with topical suggestions and interpolations, I found the British aristocracy had a will of its own and shunned borrowed ideas. In other words my titled friends inspired and dictated their articles throughout. I cannot remember an occasion when I was called upon to play the part of ghost, but more than once I might be asked to twist a contribution round, or improve it, subject to the amendments being finally passed by the signatories.

In sheer intellectual value the articles I obtained from the peerage compared most favourably with those secured elsewhere, and in many cases were streets ahead in commonsense of articles which, to benefit me, popular M.P.'s of my acquaintance had also produced. But then I did not go chasing after titled nobodies. I confined myself to the thoughtful and active element in DebreTT. My list, as I have already suggested, was shrewdly selected. I played the game with the editors for whom I worked. Whether, at the best, the game were worth playing, will always be a matter of argument. There is the objection that snobbery loomed largely in the background. Of my own choice I would not again elect for that way of making a living, even supposing it had anything like the same possibilities as twenty years ago. On the other hand, if the necessity arose, I should be prepared to turn to, and once more raid the denizens of Mayfair and Belgravia, still believing that it is better to subsist honestly by commonplace journalism, than to waste long and unprofitable hours worrying whether the means are compatible with one's supposed dignity and intelligence. Besides, if I am to apologise for any part of my life, who shall tell me where to start and where to leave off?

It can be imagined that there were snags in title-chasing, as in any other form of enterprise open to a free-lance. If, in my search for "copy," I was unlucky enough to come up against members of the peerage already engaged in writing for the Press, their resentment suggested that I was seeking to snatch the bread out of their mouths. To protest ignorance of their newspaper

commitments pleaded my cause as little as the excuse that, had I known the truth beforehand, I should not have troubled them. They were most angry, and since they preferred to wallow in their wrath, I left them to explode, and with more amenable people took "the golden road to Samarcand." After all, my concern was not with the useless mouths of the British Peerage.

The ladies of the aristocracy were far more difficult to wheedle and placate than their husbands, being suspicious of my motives, dubious of the appropriateness of publicity, and querulous of the reasons for their own selection. In the matter of results, comparing the two sexes, it took me twice as long to get a signed article from a peeress, and three times as long to induce her to pass the proof. The feminine head, plain or coroneted, bred alarms and misgivings too rapidly to suit the book of a needy journalist, who, if he were not to perish, required some kind of finality in his dealings.

As regards signed articles by members of the nobility, my average "kill" was from two to three a week. Had the rate of pay been as high as it is to-day I should have prospered exceedingly. Deducting office and cab expenses, the rate worked out none too well. Periodicals were shy of paying more than four or five guineas for any sort of article, and only once did I receive a cheque for £25. This was for an article signed by a duke that took me three weeks to secure. Considering the trouble involved it was the hardest money I ever earned.

I was not without competition in my own line. Actually one morning I met a rival free-lance on the same doorstep in Belgravia. We had both been given appointments with Lord —, but I was before my time, and he was late for his; thus we clashed. I suggested that if the two of us presented ourselves simultaneously, "the big bird" would be frightened, and in all probability we should both be kicked out. He thought my talk wise; so we agreed to toss up, the winner to be left in sole possession of the field, and the other to telephone an apology. He won, and I did the telephoning. Some time later I again tackled the same peer, explaining what had happened to the first appointment. He was so much convulsed by what I told him that he dictated a really good article. Remember I am speaking of more than twenty years ago, when the peerage had not enlisted so many of its members in the active ranks of journalism.

I very much doubt whether the same conditions apply to-day. Peers are poor, and if they lend themselves to articles they require payment. I fell on a fortunate period. Even when the supply of eligible noblemen was fast running out, I had the encouraging assurance of Mr. Asquith that, in certain eventualities, he proposed creating four hundred new peers. God looks after his own, I said to myself, as I proceeded to calculate how much in hard cash articles from such an ennobled host would be worth to me.

It must not be supposed that I confined myself entirely to articles by members of the peerage. I cast my net over a great stretch of waters. Celebrities of the sporting world, theatrical "stars," popular M.P.'s, especially Labour members like Will Crooks, business magnates—anybody in fact who made any appeal to the public—was eligible for a visit from me. I was as inevitable as a cold in winter, and often as unwelcome. I tracked my quarry down by telephone, and by visits to their mansions, clubs, country houses, tailors', or any place where they were to be located. I was just as ready to interview a notability before breakfast as before bedtime. It was a matter of indifference to me whether I interviewed a man in bed, dressed or undressed, in a nursing home, a Turkish bath, or in a cab on the way to a railway station. So long as the person I was after was alive and could speak coherently, time and place, however awkward, were not allowed to weigh with me. It was a great life, with of course numerous drawbacks and reverses. Sometimes to draw my man I had to promise fees which meant so much less for myself; sometimes I had to refuse fees which involved me in an entire waste of effort; sometimes I had to agree to a half-and-half arrangement, i.e. split the payment I was to receive.

. . . . .

Things went smoothly and adjusted themselves, if one were working for a periodical of the standing of *Answers*, for there due allowance was made for monetary hardships of the character I have indicated. *Answers* was for long one of my best markets, and in its Editor, the always merry and bright William Blackwood (since retired), I found a keen judge of good copy, as well as a fellow of infinite jest. That his humour had a rich, bantering quality, and was reinforced by a particularly virulent birr, made him all the more acceptable to my own jocular temperament. With mock horror and deep-drawn sighs he would call sympathetic associates to witness the villainy of the man, Falk, who not only flooded him with articles which he was forced to use, but, trading



on his easy, generous nature, week after week extorted free lunches out of him, to the detriment of his worldly wealth and comfort, the score, at the particular moment of denunciation, showing him at least sixty-five lunches to the bad. Challenged to deny the authenticity of the highly libellous statements I remained silent, and for refusing to speak was convicted, as the lawyers say, in contumacy.

Meanwhile, warming up to his subject, Blackwood would flood the audience chamber with his mellow, liquid Doric, against which an occasional sparse note of my softer Lancashire idiom broke with as little force as an arrow hurled at the side of a battleship. Privately I would warn Blackwood that, even if his assertion were true that I lunched entirely at his expense, and on his own showing he were no match for my superior business mentality, yet in humorous return he was more than adequately compensated. But, like the lilt of a fond lullaby, the dark saying of the free lunches he bought me clung to Blackwood's brain. As he continued to flourish the indictment, a perceptible reaction took place. People began to suspect that I was a willing party to the conspiracy, and with that growing suspicion was allied lingering doubt whether there had ever been the matter of a free lunch between us. The truth is we frequently exchanged amenities, always in the spirit of perfect friendship, though beneath may have run a regrettable tendency to wonder which of the two was profiting on the collective transactions. Had I not lost the paper on which the exchanges of hospitality were set out as a careful profit-and-loss account, I should be able to say with a convincing degree of certitude whether an odd sixpence inclined the score one way or another. However, because of Wullie's superior lung power, rather than from any evidence that he has truth on his side, I am prepared to see the legend of free lunches to the rapacious *Answers* contributor, Falk, take up as solid a position in Fleet Street anecdotage as the myth of Falk's Manchester presentation suitcase, the subscriptions to which he was supposed to have organised himself.

In such moments as Blackwood's mind, diverted from legendary raids on his hospitality, was free to discuss business, we bargained over the articles, which, like an Eastern carpet-seller, I spread before him in all the profusion of their bright colours and patterns. My difficulty was to prevent him from taking the cream, and leaving me with only the skimmed milk to offer other editors. As his was not my only market, I had politely but firmly to lay

down the law that I could not reasonably be expected to provide him, to the prejudice of my other clients, with the flower of Mayfair and Belgravia, the pick of the House of Commons, and the choice gems of the National Sporting Club. He must subscribe to the policy of, "live and let live."

The following anecdote, based on Blackwood's own words, possibly throws a more vivid sidelight on the situation as it usually worked out, than any lengthy diatribe of mine :—

Admiring the current number of *Answers*, Lord Northcliffe, as he lightly turned over the pages, stopped at a signed article by a duchess. "Where did this come from, Blackwood?" he asked. "From Falk," was the truthful answer. "And this one?" pointing to a signed article by a well-known footballer.—"From Falk, Chief."—"I see you've got a contribution from Gaby Deslys—most interesting. Who got that?"—"Falk, Chief." "And this most topical article by Will Crooks—don't tell me that came from the man Falk!"—"We are paying Falk for it, Chief." Shutting the paper with a nervous gesture, Lord Northcliffe turned thoughtfully to Blackwood, and with impressive solemnity spoke these words :—"This man Falk who is all over the paper, tell me, Blackwood, has he good health?"—"Why, Chief?"—"Because, if anything happens to him, we may have to shut down *Answers*!"

Lord Northcliffe enjoyed Blackwood's occasional sallies. Two lines of humorous poetry were printed in *Answers*, the point of which the Chief professed himself unable to see. Accordingly he wrote to Blackwood, saying that neither he nor any of his secretaries could understand why the lines had been printed. Blackwood wrote back that he had taken the lines from Edward Lear's *Book of Nonsense*. Had not Lord Northcliffe heard of him? The Chief wrote back :

"MY DEAR BLACKWOOD,

You are grossly impertinent to,

Your affectionate

CHIEF."

The classical Blackwood yarn, embellished by fancy, relates to a golf match with Sir George was head of the Amalgamated Press. On took with them two venerable caddies, luxuriantly bearded, the other waving a h

arm. Each smoked a clay cutty, with bowl turned downwards, and whenever the pipe of the one-armed man required filling, his mate ceased whatever he was doing to oblige him. As comrades through thick and thin, they were wonderful ; as caddies they left much to be desired. Whenever the ball was sliced into the heather, the two tall, swift-striding players would be on the spot long before the toiling and puffing ex-sailors could catch them up. Tired of the uneven struggle, Sutton hinted to Blackwood that it would be as well if a change were made. Before dismissing the caddies, Blackwood, groping his way through the cloud of black tobacco smoke which enveloped them, tried the effect of an appeal to reason. Barely had he finished when the two men threw down their bags. After viciously expectorating, the one with the beard constituted himself spokesman and thus held forth :—" Look 'ere, Guv'nor, we're quitting, and right now, and we'll tell yer why. When me and my mate started out with yer, we didn't contract to run after a pair of ruddy racehorses ! "

## CHAPTER XVII

### HIGH COST OF BOHEMIANISM

**N**EVER knowing how long my luck on any particular paper would last, I did my best to have as many strings to my bow as possible. For some months I worked as an ordinary space reporter on the *Pall Mall Gazette*, arranging my assignments with Sidney Head (the father of the present assistant editor of the *Daily Mail*), who was the news-editor and a sort of Pooh-Bah. Anxious to produce a bright and readable first edition of the paper, he encouraged suitable contributions brought in first thing in the morning. He rarely arrived without finding me ready with an exclusive column, or with an idea where a good column might quickly be obtained. While I lasted I concentrated almost entirely on these early editions, whose great, yawning spaces wanted some filling.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* had its readers among the better classes, but occasionally a stray placard would drift into the wrong neighbourhood. Thus in South London, at a time when the popular "evenings" were placarding a sensational local murder, I noticed, stuck up at one of the newsagents', the following alluring contents bill :—

*Pall Mall Gazette*

## ART NOTES

(SPECIAL)

It was difficult for me to visualise the honest, hard-working housewives of the Walworth Road resting from their labours over the wash-tub, in order to read what the *Pall Mall Gazette* art critic had to say of Sargent's latest landscape.

In the last year of this celebrated journal which John Morley and W. T. Stead were once proud to edit, an aid to sales was found in a "Special Course Selection," generally proved to be successful. But one afternoon, sad to relate, the "Special Course Selection" dropped dead at the starting-point, and for that day at least, as Tony Praga wittily labelled it, the tip was known as the "Special Corpse Selection."

I have said I never knew how long my luck on a particular paper would last. I was ever chopping and changing. There came a week when it was not a case of chopping and changing, but of entire collapse.

Take the week's events, set out day by day :—

Monday : A daily London letter written for a provincial paper is stopped for reasons of economy.

Tuesday : No more work for me on a monthly magazine the major part of whose contents I have long contributed : Reason : change of proprietorship.

Wednesday : Contributions stopped on a daily paper which has regularly taken a stipulated number of my paragraphs. Explanation : economies enforced by new proprietor.

Thursday : An American-owned newspaper on which I have been a favoured contributor shuts down.

Friday : I am no longer *persona grata* with the controller of a weekly periodical where there has been a change of editorship.

Saturday : Suspension of my contributions to another periodical. Reason : economy.

In six days I saw the whole of a varied and widely-spread free-lance connection crumble up, a connection in the building of which I prided myself I had given complete satisfaction. I admit to being staggered at first by the completeness of the blow, but, as was usual with me, I neither moped nor wasted time in cursing Fate. I put my wits to work to replace the papers that had gone, and by the end of the following week found myself in just as good a position as ever to earn a livelihood. In addition to writing, I

was now determined to try my hand at newspaper photography. With that end in view I registered a small company with the name of "News-Pictures," installed the necessary apparatus, and engaged an expert salesman who had been with the *Daily Mirror*. At the actual business of photographic production I soon proved a hopeless failure, and dropped the thing like a hot brick; but at the business of collecting and selling exclusive photographs taken by other people, I was a huge success. Unfortunately for this side of my efforts, my salesman-colleague, sensing more profit in working on his own account, drifted away, and more and more actual writing tended to monopolise my time. I remember that my photographic associate lived in a mysterious place called Billericay, on whose rural delights with the idea of tempting me there he was never tired of expatiating, though I failed to extract from him any suitable reason why a restless fellow like myself should be rusticated in remotest Essex. Before he left I secured many big photographic "exclusives," of which a number were sold to Hannen Swaffer, who had joined the *Daily Sketch* and was in charge of the pictures. Moreover I contributed daily a number of gossip paragraphs to the clever and outspoken page which he had introduced—until the inevitable Hulton economies intervened. Then I had the disturbing sense of being rationed, and wisely and prudently prepared for this market to disappear, like so many others.

Meanwhile the rackets life—irregular working hours and meal times, never knowing what unpleasant surprises the morrow would bring forth—told heavily on my health. My sallow appearance led a sympathetic office neighbour to pay me a visit. He knew, he said, what was the matter with me. I required to use daily a stomach pump. It had saved him and it would save me. But, like parts of the Sahara, I remained unirrigated, and passed the information on elsewhere. A free-lance with a stomach pump! That would, indeed, have been the last straw.

I have a weakness for unconventional people, and certain forms of bohemianism appeal to me, but I am not naturally a bohemian myself. When I have been carried away into the irresponsible eddies of social life, mostly it has been against my will. Hannen Swaffer introduced me to Jo Davidson, the black-haired, black-browed American sculptor, whose genius is as emphatic as his views. To hear Jo expound we went one night to a club where they sold coffee that had more flavouring than cream. Following the orthodox procedure I planked down a sovereign, and as I saw

it disappear with unpleasant rapidity, I cried out at the high cost of bohemianism. A sovereign in those days meant an appreciable slice of my income. Quieting down under the influence of the persuasive tongues of my companions, and the soporific effect of the "doctored" coffee, I listened to Davidson, as in the celebrated manner of Napoleon he swiftly worked himself into a passion. "If I were employed at Carmelite House," he roared, "I should stand at the head of the stairs, and shout at the top of my voice, 'I am a Jew.'" I agreed the effect would be decisive; *he would be kicked out*. Anyhow the idea was scarcely original. As he went about the streets of Paris, Modigliane, who painted the ladies with the elongated necks, shouted in the ears of prospective buyers, "Je suis un Juif."

A picturesque bohemian whose acquaintance I made was Redmond Howard, nephew of John Redmond, who as he gracefully reclined in bed thrummed a guitar for the entertainment of his friends. Were you in need of a night's shelter, you had only to mention the fact to this good-natured Irishman, and promptly he would quit his comfortable bed and invite you to take his place. A shakedown on the couch suited him just as well. Such unselfishness corrected a great many of my ideas about human nature in Fleet Street.

On the strength of a picture I had bought from a struggling painter, word went forth that I was a Mæcenæ of the Arts, and I had a warm invitation to attend a charity tombola where drawings were to be auctioned. The enthusiasm was frantic. At the end of the evening I was committed to purchases representing in cash a week's full work. This was an occasion when I really enjoyed parting with money. My appetite had not been staled by usage. I might have felt more at home in bohemian circles, had I not been conscious of one great handicap: my companions were usually men of genius without any money, who regarded me as a man of money without any genius. If means of fair exchange had existed all would have been well, but, in the nature of things it was impossible, and regretfully I came to the conclusion that bohemianism, as Heine said of religion, was a good thing—for others.

The more prosperous X, a distinguished journalist, grew the more fidgety he became about his health. Noticing a swelling on

his leg, X immediately sent for two eminent specialists. As he exposed the limb for their inspection, he spoke these words in a hollow sepulchral voice that seemed to issue from his nether parts: "I have sent for you two gentlemen to learn the truth. If it is cancer, let me know. Don't hide the facts from me, I implore you. I am a man of will-power and prepared to die. Tell me the worst, if it is the worst, but don't fool me."

They looked gravely at the swelling, thumbed first this part of the leg, then that part, without seeming to be satisfied. Finally they asked permission to withdraw into another room, and while the patient lay back with a look of supreme, almost unearthly resignation on his face, the two great men remained deep in consultation. Every now and then their low whispers penetrated to the room where the patient anxiously awaited them.

In half an hour's time they returned to announce their decision. The leg must be operated on immediately. "Why immediately?" exclaimed the alarmed journalist. "I have something important to do to-day. Operate to-morrow."—"To-morrow will be too late," cried the specialists in one voice. "Yes, too late."

"Why too late?" demanded the frightened journalist. Bowing, as if to indicate that the awful facts were being dragged out of them by force, they answered: "To-morrow will be too late for any operation, because by to-morrow the swelling will have disappeared."

I like this story which, until I gave it a permanent home, lay a foundling in the taverns and teashops of Fleet Street, crying out to be adopted. Comfortably rested on a page which I had prepared, it was handed round for general admiration.

"There is someone who is cleverer than Voltaire, cleverer than Bonaparte, cleverer than any Minister in the past or in the future, and that person is Everybody."

Talleyrand was right. I did not know, but Everybody knew, that this amusing child of the brain bore a suspicious resemblance to one of Lord Castlerosse's sprightly mental offspring, the main difference, so I was told, being that in his version the swelling which caused all the fuss was definitely diagnosed as due to mosquito bite.

Be the parentage what it may, the precious infant remains just as dear to my heart, and, my need being greater than his, Lord Castlerosse, I am certain, will be generous enough to leave him with me.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### LORD NORTHCLIFFE AT CLOSE RANGE

A MONTH or two after the outbreak of War, on the invitation of Hannen Swaffer who had been appointed Editor of the *Weekly Dispatch*,<sup>1</sup> I returned to Carmelite House. In the five years' interval many strange things had happened to me. If I had left no mark on Fleet Street to speak of, yet, if that were any advantage, I could truthfully say that few journalists were better known, or, as unkind people would qualify, more notorious. For convenience sake I used my own Fleet Street office. At appointed hours copy-boys would arrive from Carmelite House to collect such columns as I had ready. I remember a week, when being given a page to do and only twenty-four hours for the material to be procured and written, I continued my work at a West End typewriting establishment, dictating column after column until the night had sped and it was time for breakfast. I had worked the clock round.

When the *Lusitania* was sunk, and it was necessary to give over the whole space of the paper to this first-class sensation, all the copy I had in type, some ten columns in all, was scrapped, but with only Friday evening and Saturday to pull up in, I managed by the time the first edition went to press to be represented in the paper by the same amount, all fresh matter. It meant, of course, slaving like a nigger.

When the Derby scheme was launched, we all went to New Scotland Yard to be medically examined. As I was placed in one of the low categories, I was included amongst those for whom exemption was asked by the office, and when a question of deleting some of the names arose, Lord Northcliffe expressly ruled that I was not to be interfered with. While he would allow no able-bodied man in his employ to be held back from the Army, he saw little object in rushing into the field an unfit person, such as

<sup>1</sup> When Lord Rothermere took over the control, the title was changed to *Sunday Dispatch* to conform to the changed character of the contents. So long as the paper gave the week's news, the old title was quite suitable, but when only the latest news was printed, it was misleading and inappropriate.

myself. The 2s. 8d. Derby money I set aside in a specially marked envelope to be kept as a souvenir, but that did not deter burglars from coming along and collaring it. Some skunks would steal Holy Water, if they thought there was any money in it.

Long before the official accounts of the early battles were given out, the *Dispatch* featured long stories based on the graphic narratives of wounded soldiers, and pieced together to form a connected whole. They were my work, and at least one—the story of the battle of Neuve Chappelle obtained from wounded sergeant-majors directly back from the conflict—was worth the large prominence it received on the front page. Unimpressed, Lord Northcliffe passed the caustic comment, “We have had enough of Falk’s battle pictures.” It is due to Swaffer to say that he pertinaciously defended these contributions of mine as admiabie journalism.

Having a flair for catchy, talking features, the Editor persuaded the Chief that out of his own views and news, which never got into the papers, the best gossip column in London could be fashioned. Acting on Swaffer’s recommendation he agreed to do the feature, but on one condition—that I saw him every Friday morning and extracted the “copy.” Set in big type and spaced out, the matter sometimes filled three whole columns of the *Dispatch*.

Lord Northcliffe was the only man in the firm in a position to express whatever views he pleased. *Nobody could call him to order*. Anonymity helped him to be even more daring than was his custom. He went so far as to bestow titles on the people he twitted, which digs, seeing that no malice was intended, the victims took in commendably good part. His own staff were not spared. He spoke of them as being vitalised by the Chief Proprietor as early as 5 a.m. But it was not its teasing note which made “The Secret History of the Week” unique, so much as the vigour with which the most provocative issues of the day were tackled.

At the first of the dictations which took place at his house in St. James’s Place, Lord Northcliffe was in a jocular mood. As I entered the room, he turned to the butler and in a stage whisper murmured, “Lock up the spoons; *he* has arrived.” On the table rested an open cigar box. Conspicuously displayed on the top was a piece of paper with the words, “Don’t steal!” When the arrangement was running smoothly, our meetings, more often

than not, would take place at *The Times* office, about midday. For a change I would be told to see him in the afternoon at Fleetway House, where there was usually a cup of tea and a piece of cake for me. Lord Northcliffe ate his own piece of cake and drank his own cup of tea with great rapidity. On one occasion, before I could help myself to either tea or cake, he had rung the bell for the things to be cleared away, saying that he had no time for tea-parties. However, on my producing three digestive biscuits from my own pocket, he ordered the tea tray to be brought back.

Sat back in a long easy chair, his mind refreshed by a few scribbled notes, Lord Northcliffe, rarely at a loss for a suitable word, would dictate his delectable matter, tricking it out with the familiar phrases endeared to his fancy. If his own supply of matter were inadequate, he would invite me to submit suitable questions which he could answer to some purpose; or, with a sort of back-hand compliment, he would request me to add my own little bits, the emphasis on the "little bits" being most marked. He liked his own phraseology which was compact, firm and easily understood, but he did not mind, nay would welcome, obvious improvements; and I would frequently twist round an awkward sentence, tone down excessive asperities which offended against good taste, and introduce an apt quotation.

Under the stimulus given to it by Lord Northcliffe, "Secret History" became the most discussed feature in Sunday journalism. Its authorship gave rise to endless speculation, not least among the politicians whose ears were tweaked. If shrewd people guessed Lord Northcliffe's connection, they were never sure, and the only enlightenment they obtained from me was the cryptic remark that paragraphs suitable for inclusion were paid for at the highest rates in journalism. Yet the authoritative note, the sly wit, the man-of-the-world cynicism with which barbed references to high-placed dignitaries were clothed, together with the behind-the-scenes style—all were so many signposts pointing to Lord Northcliffe.

In Carmelite House it was an understood thing that the authorship of the celebrated feature remained an impenetrable mystery. Wise people, when questioned, professed wholesome ignorance of the anonymous writer, and were scrupulously on their guard against Lord Northcliffe's artful inquiries. Members of his staff were often rung up on the telephone, and asked to inform him what impertinent contributor had written such and such a para-

graph in the "Secret History." To have answered in such a way as to betray the slightest knowledge of the writer of the column, would have been to show oneself sadly lacking in shrewdness and tact. Of course when a saucy jab at the staff appeared in the mysterious column, the task of closing your eyes to the obvious truth became a superstitious duty, rather than an act of commonsense.

A pleasing ceremony was associated with Lord Northcliffe's dictation. As a reward for my services I received a cigar. When I particularly commended myself to him the gift was increased to two cigars, and on such occasions as I produced a number of piquant paragraphs, I might choose the cigars myself. One red-letter day I proposed helping myself to the choice brand in the glass-container kept on his desk. "What!" he exclaimed in assumed alarm, "you have the nerve to pick on those cigars! Don't you know, young man, they cost 3s. 6d. each?"—"Yes, Chief," was my conciliatory reply. "But they are worth it!"

My dear young Man  
 Are you aware the  
 your paper has been  
 late repeatedly?  
 Shakespeare himself could  
 not increase the influence  
 & circulation of your journal  
 if the Management deliberately  
 prevented the public from  
 getting it  
 Be shrewder.  
 Chief

A CHARACTERISTIC REBUKE FROM LORD NORTHCLIFFE  
 ADDRESSED TO THE AUTHOR WHEN HE WAS EDITOR OF THE  
 "SUNDAY DISPATCH"

The sudden arrival of important news had delayed the paper going to press, and it was a question whether it were better to miss it, or be ten minutes behind time on the printing machines.

To fuss over these special cigars amused Lord Northcliffe, and it paid to look impressed as he solemnly explained for your enlightenment that they were retained exclusively for Prime Ministers, Archbishops, Ambassadors of State, visiting editors from the Continent and America, prize-fighters, and royalties of the status of King Manuel. That a reporter on his own staff should aspire to such extravagance was not a thing to be lightly endured. However, in my case, he was prepared to humour me on the distinct understanding that it must *never, never*, occur again. In practice it resulted that I received both the admonition and the coveted cigars. Deprived of the seasoning of the preliminary rebuke, it is possible that they would not have smoked nearly so well.

I remember taking him the proof of an article written up from a few fragmentary notes he had given me. He was unable to see me, but when the proof came back three fine cigars were rolled up in it; while scribbled at the foot I read this note: "a magnificent piece of journalism." Whether the effort deserved such flattery is perhaps beside the point; yet any article that could draw from Lord Northcliffe three of his best cigars must have been out of the ordinary.

Attacking Kitchener for the shell shortage, Lord Northcliffe began a sentence with the phrase, "Lord Kitchener, a tall man with a narrow forehead." Nobody but Lord Northcliffe would have drawn a portrait of the Field-Marshal in those exact words. When he discussed Kitchener with me, he was never as unsympathetic as his severe criticisms suggested. With the popular conception of the great soldier as a strong, silent man, he entirely disagreed. That phase of Kitchener, he insisted, had passed, and now one had to visualise an emotional and vacillating elderly gentleman severely handicapped by loss of sleep, due to neuralgia of the head. Those who agree that Lord Northcliffe helped as much as anybody to win the War, and at the same time are aware of his unrivalled sources of information, will be ready to concede that he was entitled to his opinions about Lord Kitchener, for which, in the temporary unpopularity of his newspapers, he willingly paid a heavy price.

There is nothing more unpleasant and ungrateful than the modern operation known as "debunking," of which art Lord Northcliffe in a journalistic sense, and Lytton Strachey in a literary and artistic sense, were this century's most accomplished practitioners. In cases where Lord Northcliffe attempted to

"debunk" military and political reputations, using plain, bold English to convey his judgments, he was severely taken to task by sentimentalists, who urged that it was cruel and harsh to break popular idols in the market-place.

It is beyond my purpose to pass any settled verdict on the great figures, military and political, whom Lord Northcliffe attacked, but this I can say in all truthfulness, that throughout the War, whenever he campaigned against anybody highly-placed, he was not working out any private grudge, but courageously doing his best to see that the men who deserved to be at the top got their chance, and were not held back by second-raters, as had so often happened before in our history. On the other hand, when he stood up for one of the Great War figures in whom he believed, Lord Haig for instance, those critics who could never see any good in him declared that he was making it difficult for the government of the day to appoint the man they wanted.

The day Lord Kitchener was known to be dead, someone asked Lord Northcliffe what he thought. "I am thinking only of the country," was his answer.

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At the foot of the War Office staircase I would sometimes see Alfred de Rothschild. He was waiting to take the Field-Marshal off to lunch at his beautiful house in Park Lane. I have no doubt that the fine dining-room hung with the four lovely Gainsboroughs greatly pleased Kitchener's artistic soul, which warmed to works of art, especially to the charming creations of an older and more decorative age.

During a Cabinet meeting held at the beginning of the War, Augustine Birrell said to Kitchener, "The Germans look like getting to Paris." Quick came the calm reply, "Well, they have been there before."

When in a reminiscent mood Lord Northcliffe had a taste for enlarging on his association with Lloyd George, and, with a chuckle in his voice, would say that the sight of his own familiar tall hat coming round the bend of Downing Street sent shivers down the backs of the Premier's entourage. As a matter of fact he liked talking to Lloyd George and to his two secretaries (Sir) J. T. Davies and (Sir) William Sutherland, and my impression was that they enjoyed talking to him. Once his business with the Prime Minister had been so urgent that Lloyd George had no scruples in leaving a Cabinet meeting in order to attend to him.

That story may have been a little playful exaggeration on Lord Northcliffe's part.

I was with Lord Northcliffe the crucial Friday and Saturday in December 1916, when the fate of Asquith as Premier was determined, and the way prepared for the ascent of Lloyd George. Well apprised of the developments in the swiftly changing political drama, he remarked to me that Friday morning, "They have got the old man down at last," after which he proceeded to telephone one of Lloyd George's secretaries at the War Office, saying that he intended to remain in town over the week-end, in case he were wanted.

On the Saturday morning Lord Northcliffe dictated to me the notes for a leading news article in the *Dispatch*, strongly criticising Bonar Law's allegiance to Asquith. The Conservative leader was adjured to abandon his abject posturings before the Prime Minister (Asquith).

In view of the importance which Asquith attached to Monday's leading article in *The Times*, defining his part in the proposed reconstruction of the Government, it is a little curious that he should have overlooked almost similar references in the *Weekly Dispatch*, which the previous day had come out with these two definite statements :—

1. Mr. Lloyd George has made several proposals to change matters for the better. One is the formation of a small War Council on which Sir Edward Carson would be a member, and those apostles of delay, Messrs. Asquith and Bonar Law, excluded.
2. If Mr. Lloyd George's proposal is adopted, the effect will not be to dispense with the intellectual gifts of the Prime Minister, but to make his functions administrative, rather than executive.

While Asquith's quarrel with *The Times* article was that he was being prospectively represented as a mere figurehead, *The Thundrerer* said little more than the *Dispatch* of the previous day, although the language used may have been more positive and direct, and the inferences more authoritative. As the sincerity of Asquith cannot be questioned, the only conclusion to be drawn is that neither the statesman, nor his friends, had seen the *Dispatch*, despite its reputation as the active week-end mouthpiece of Lord Northcliffe.

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The suggestion that the article in *The Times* could only be the result of a betrayal of confidence led Lloyd George to disavow all knowledge of any disclosure, while Lord Northcliffe proclaimed himself to me, and to others, equally blameless. Was there in the Asquithian sense an unnamed villain of the piece? A great newspaper zealously guards its secrets, and it would be presumptuous, nay even indelicate, on my part to hazard a guess. My experience has been that most mysteries, when cleared up, have proved disappointingly simple. To the curious I would offer this consoling parable: An eminent philosopher, discussing the riddle of the universe, remarked that if our finite minds ever chanced upon the right answer its simplicity would start us laughing, and to such an uncontrollable degree, that we should probably die of hysterics.

My impression of the fateful last days of the Asquith coalition was that the Prime Minister's intentions remained in doubt up to the eleventh hour. When he was with Lloyd George he seemed to be moving in the direction that the War Minister desired; when he was away from Lloyd George and with colleagues who thought him ill-used, his mind turned back on its tracks. Personally, I was sorry that Asquith, for whom I had a tremendous admiration, could not be induced to swallow his pride, and, realising that the country stood sadly in need of the tonic of a change of Premiers, agree to take over the Lord Chancellorship, a position which he would have filled with consummate dignity. Seated on the Woolsack he would have been comparatively safe from the attacks of his newspaper critics; his sound advice would have been available to the Government of the day, and no one could have denied his right to be one of the British Peace Plenipotentiaries.

"The War is too serious for Generals," Clemenceau told Lloyd George. The War was too serious for personal pride. Amidst the partisan din this point should not have been overlooked. A week after the fall of the first Coalition, Lord Northcliffe informed *Dispatch* readers that before Lloyd George decided on breaking away from Asquith, he looked much older than his fifty-three years, but that within a few hours of taking the step he looked ten years younger.

While he never relented in his opinion of Asquith's unsuitability as a War Premier, Lord Northcliffe was disgusted by the indecent



haste of the time-servers to be ranged on the winning side. He compared their movements to the flight of the courtiers from the bedside of Louis XV, and, as a fitting allusion, quoted the cynical definition of gratitude as : " a lively sense of favours to come."

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I would hate to add one word to the unfair, depreciatory chorus which has arisen since the death of the Marquis Curzon. Physical sufferings, bravely borne, should have saved him from too harsh condemnation. After thinking it over carefully, I can see no harm in mentioning that on the Sunday before Asquith's fall, Curzon said to one of his friends : " I would rather crawl on my hands and knees round my drawing-room than serve Lloyd George." He meant it when he said it, but soon changed his attitude. So far from doing violence to his reputation, it only shows that he was not the obstinate character he was assumed to be.

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*George (Curzon) had a Jewish Grandmother, and perhaps could bear persecution unconsciously.* To come across this reference to Lord Curzon in the long chapter in Shane Leslie's book, *Studies in Sublime Failure*, was to remind me of frequent conversations with Lord Northcliffe on this very point. He maintained that not only had the Marquis Curzon Jewish blood in his veins, but that the name " Curzon " was actually a corruption or refinement, dating back from some remote period, of the name of the ancient priestly division of the Israelites—Cohen—and he pointed to the number of Jews who called themselves Curzon. While restraining my laughter, I ventured with great respect to assert that this was not a conclusive argument, since I knew of a Jew, living quite close to Carmelite House, who answered to the name of Harmsworth. It was a bold thing to say, and the better to note the effect of my remark I took a quick side-glance at the Chief. He was very angry. That anybody but a Christian should dare call himself, " Harmsworth," was an outrage comparable with *lèse majesté*, for which in well-conducted States offenders are severely punished. " Was I quite sure of my information ? " he asked with ill-repressed irritation. Yes, I was quite sure, and I ventured to show him the name hung out as a sign for all and sundry to notice. That the man should not only take the name of Harmsworth, but openly advertise the fact, was too much for his patience. He ordered me to have the scandal stopped at once, and that there should be no doubt about the matter, Kenneth Henderson, the manager of the legal department, was instructed to take such

steps as the law provided to restrain the impudent fellow. Alas ! be the name "Harmsworth" ever so honourable, there is no copyright in it, and even the protection which belongs to an ordinary trade-mark cannot be claimed on its behalf.

If musty legal tomes could have helped to give the Chief satisfaction, Henderson, I am sure, would eagerly have devoured them all. If I could have persuaded all Jews calling themselves "Harmsworth" to drop the name, I would gladly have done so, for I could see that Lord Northcliffe's dignity had been severely upset. We were both entirely helpless in the matter. The Chief fumed and fretted, but the outrage went on unchecked.

The house which the Chief occupied in St. James's Place was Samuel Rogers' old residence. It stood in a quiet side-track, giving him privacy and a welcome freedom from the raucous noises of the West End. In answer to a summons, I arrived there one morning to find the secretaries busy at work in a little room off the hall, normally used as a lady's boudoir. Regardless of the dainty articles of toilet—hair brushes, powder boxes, manicure files—still arranged about the dressing-table, they were calling up people and attending to messages with feverish energy. Upstairs, still in his bed, the Chief, when not actually telephoning, was wading through proofs. As I entered the room, I was immediately instructed to make myself useful. A statesman representing a minor Foreign Power rang up. Hearing his name, Lord Northcliffe turned to me and said : "deal with this nuisance. Speak as if you were myself." Dropping the books of reference I was looking up for him, I began, as instructed, to imitate his voice with, what I thought was, remarkable success, but the chilly looks I got from the bed rather cramped my style. After a number of non-committal replies, I fobbed off the unwelcome Excellency without giving him cause to be annoyed, and in considerable trepidation waited for the Chief's comment. He proceeded to rate me. "A fine mess you made of the job," he said. "Instead of imitating my voice as I told you, what you gave off was a double dose of unadulterated Wigan. What will this cultured gentleman think ?" Not usually at a loss for a reply, I mildly rejoined : "the worse that can happen is that he will think that you have been to Blackpool for your holidays, and unconsciously picked up the Lancashire accent." That ended the episode. I was not denied the customary backsheesh of a cigar, but just as I was leaving I had impressed upon me the narrowness of my escape from being "fired," which, being interpreted, meant, "All's well."

Before Lloyd George became Prime Minister, calling at 10 Downing Street was largely a waste of time. It was too much to expect the over-worked War Leader to receive visitors of less rank than leading newspapers proprietors, but he was well and truly served by two able and adroit lieutenants, J. T. Davies and William Sutherland, both permitted a large discretion. When the War had long been over, I ran into Sir J. T. Davies in a place far removed from the political arena, to be exact, the bear pit at Whipnade, where we amused ourselves watching the antics of the quaint four-footed comedians housed there.

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On one of my visits to 10 Downing Street, I shared the coal-fire in the hall with Lady Randolph Churchill, a dainty and attractive figure in becoming furs. She was waiting to interest Lloyd George in some War charity function.

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As Lord Northcliffe liked to be entertained with the latest tit-bits of political gossip, I told him that in influential circles he was being debated, as he was Irish born, as a possible Viceroy of Ireland. He was not flattered, saying that the office was purely ornamental and without significance. Any big newspaper proprietor could consider himself fifty times more important. In the light of subsequent events, how true were his words to prove!

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The careful newspaper reader who was in England during the War years, 1916-17-18, may remember the mysterious illnesses which overtook certain members of the Government. Whenever rumour asserted that the health of a particular Minister was failing, one had a clear warning that he was not long for office. Nowadays, prospective resignations from the Government are not prefaced with anything like the same elaborate and kindly preparation of the public mind, nor is the need felt for such merciful shock-absorbers. In the years of which I speak, some Ministers due for the axe were unnecessarily slow in getting out, and their protests as to being sound in wind and limb were sadly lacking in tact and patriotism. How often had I to assure an obstinate politician that my information as to the state of his health was later and better than his own!

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During the War the Chief worked early and late, never sparing himself. At the same time he appreciated zeal in others. Telephoning one of the departments at Fleetway House (home of the Amalgamated Press) at midnight, he was surprised to hear a young woman's voice come over the switch-board. On inquiry, he discovered that she was substituting for a man at the Front. He promptly gave orders that she was to be sent home each night in a taxi-cab, and, as a reward for her ungrudging services, instructed the management to promote her fiancé on his return from the War.

In those days the Chief, taking a leaf out of the book of Delane, the famous editor of *The Times*, travelled in cheap workmen's trains and public omnibuses in order to listen to the talk of ordinary, everyday people—one way of keeping his ear to the ground.

Lord Riddell used to tell a good story of an adventure in a third-class carriage in which he and Lord Northcliffe participated. Hurrying to catch the train for Portsmouth, he bumped into Lord Northcliffe (then living at Sutton Place, by Guildford), who was also making for Waterloo. They decided to travel down together, reaching the station just as the gates to the platform were being drawn. All they could manage to do was to scramble into the last compartment, a third-class smoker. Here sat a burly navvy, puffing away at a clay pipe fed with the coarsest thick twist. The pungent smoke made Lord Northcliffe cough, and, to remedy matters, he passed his cigar-case round; thereupon the navvy condescended to unbend, and conversation became general. At Guildford, Lord Northcliffe alighted, leaving Lord Riddell alone with the hefty gentleman. "Do you know who that was?" he said to the navvy.—"Nah."—"That was Lord Northcliffe."—"Lord Northcliffe!" repeated the navvy scarcely able to believe his ears. "Lord Northcliffe! Fancy 'im talkin' ter two blokes the likes of us!"

Of Lord Riddell, I have only one more thing to say, not an unkind remark, I hope. When, as chief proprietor of the *News of the World*, he became associated with the well known literary organ, *John o' London's Weekly*, in which his own taste found appropriate vent, the cynics observed that he had succeeded in providing uplift for Monday, as well as Sunday.

What days they were when Zeppelins came over London and dropped their bombs, sometimes getting away, sometimes being caught! I remember S.L. XI falling, a burning mass, into some

fields at Cuffley, and the L. 31 dropping in flames at Potter's Bar. In the early hours of the morning, with the temperature at freezing-point, I went chasing after them, to find that there were already souvenir hunters on the scene. As it seemed the thing to pick up bits of the metal lying about, I helped myself to several fragments, which I afterwards distributed to friends with a taste for morbid curios.

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On Saturday nights, after the paper had gone to press, we stood by waiting for air raids, a dreary enough business. To while away the time we used to play poker. My recollection is that Swaffer won as often as I lost ; but I was never any good at cards or games of chance.

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There were War-time happenings that never got into the papers. In the first year Lord Lansdowne lost a bundle of important papers lent to him by the Committee of Imperial defence. They were blown out through the window of his railway carriage, while he was travelling from his country seat at Bowood to London. Much to his relief, as can readily be imagined, the precious sheets were picked up on the line intact.

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A well-known peer, desirous of associating himself with the national sacrifices, cut down his establishment, "sacking" amongst others the gardener. To his astonishment the man carried on as usual. "What are you doing here ?" he asked him. "Well," was the conclusive reply. "You don't seem to know a good gardener when you've got one, but I know a good boss when I've got one !"

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In the War Parliament a familiar figure was the enormously wealthy shipowner, Sir Robert Houston, from whom the widow, the eccentric Lady Houston, inherited a fortune of several millions. Because of his red beard he was known, even to a staid personality like Mr. McKenna, as "the Pirate King." His table in the House, where he dispensed hospitality to a number of friends, was called "Houston's Corner." It was a rendezvous for the "free-lances" in the legislative assembly, M.P.'s full of mischief and devilment, with ever a good paragraph for the persistent newsman who trailed their movements. As a source of provocative and

intriguing "copy" Houston stood in a class by himself. An interview with him meant a column of the breeziest reading.

Shipowners were always open to attack, but Houston stoutly defended his class; mention of which conveniently brings me to the sleeve-links of Ian Macpherson, Under-Secretary for War when Lord Derby was War Minister. Bearing the mystic numerals, 1430, the links were a present from Lord Derby to commemorate the victory of his son and heir, Lord Stanley, in the famous June 1917 by-election in the Abercromby Division of Liverpool. An ex-soldier was standing as independent candidate, and the silver-badge men made things warm for speakers who supported Lord Stanley, himself bravely fighting in the field. At the most turbulent gathering, Ian Macpherson was continually interrupted by shouts: "what about shipping profits?"—"Yes, what about shipping profits," he repeated; then proceeded to turn the tables neatly on his interruptors by reading from Hansard a passage revealing one of the champions of the silver-badge men as the stoutest ally of the shipowners. Not only did that sally put an end to the clamour, but it helped to win the election for Lord Stanley, whose majority corresponded with the numerals on the cuff-links.

Houston used to tell the story of a foreign Prince, who fell in love at first sight with a beautiful woman gambler at Monte Carlo. But on the exalted personage venturing to present his addresses, he was brusquely warned off by a stentorian voice exclaiming: "that lady is playing with my money, please!" The Prince apologised, bowed and moved off. Years later when that foreign Prince sat on the throne of his forefathers, he met the man who had rebuked him. Without hesitation he marched up to him and said: "I remember you from Monte Carlo. You were with the beautiful lady, and you spoke roughly to me. My friend, you were quite right. I had no business to step in between you two. But, my dear sir, what a face! What a figure!"

An apple of enormous size, which had won first prize at a horticultural show, was sent to the *Daily Mail* office to be raffled for a War charity. Unfortunately the accompanying letter was temporarily mislaid. Noticing the piece of fruit on his mantel-piece, a good-natured member of the staff passed it on to colleagues who liked apples. When the apple had served as dessert, the missing letter was retrieved from the waste-paper basket.

The luckless culprit, realising what he had done, sent a cheque for five guineas to the fund by way of compensation—much more than a raffle would have produced. Few journalists can boast of having paid such a sum for a single apple.

When the exploits of Trebitsch Lincoln, ex-Darlington M.P. and self-confessed spy, were filling the newspapers, a pathetic and embarrassed woman nervously tip-toed into the *Dispatch* office to explain that she was the wife of Lincoln, was in distressed circumstances, and to relieve her plight had brought along a number of her husband's letters for sale and publication. We did not wish to traffic in these missives, entertaining though they were to a public hungry for news about the extraordinary adventurer, but the woman pleaded so hard for help for herself and her four dependent children, that out of sheer compassion we decided to buy and use portions of the letters. The first batch were addressed by Lincoln from Audubun Avenue, New York City, and were couched in the most affectionate terms, with such phrases as :—

"My darling. . . . My fate is what it has always been. I succeed up to a certain point, and just when everything seems assured, everything is gone and I have to start anew. . . . I embrace you, darling, with my deepest love and kiss you fervently."

Enclosed were letters for his children. In other letters he reproached his wife, whose replies had gone astray, for not writing to him. "Don't you love me any more?" he asked. "I am thinking about you constantly, and worried about you till I am frantic." He had a graphic pen, and the letters which he wrote in Raymond Street gaol, Brooklyn, where he was awaiting extradition on a charge of forgery, gave as interesting an account of prison life as one might hope to see.

Mrs. Lincoln's faith in her husband never wavered. "I do not regret one minute of my married life," she told me. In 1920 she was in domestic employment in England; then she appears to have returned to Germany, but from year to year she visited this country, once, at any rate, on the saddest and most tragical of missions—to take a last leave of her soldier son under circumstances which need not be dwelt upon here. If ever a woman suffered it was Trebitsch Lincoln's wife.

Meanwhile the irrepressible Trebitsch went on exhausting the

gamut of human experience. Trained to be a Rabbi, he became instead a Lutheran, then assistant in a Presbyterian mission to convert the Jews, and when last heard of was passing himself off as a monk with the good Chinese name of Chao Kung. One Oriental definition or another—what did it matter? Yet by far his wisest course would have been to stick to his original Jewish name of Isaac.



## CHAPTER XIX

### GOLD ON THE MOVE

**Y**EARS that the locust hath eaten ! I thought of the Biblical saying as I reminded myself how blurred and remote had become the bitter years, when I gambled and lost all I had in Fleet Street. Misty and unreal seemed those afflicted days, all but blotted out by the thriving present. Time had done its work. If only the War with its tragic hold on the national existence could be brought to a victorious conclusion, with what more assured confidence might I and everybody else look forward to the future ! But with Europe a stricken battlefield, and the whole atmosphere of human society miserable and unnatural, who that was at all sensitive, or had any kind of heart, could find the slightest satisfaction in the struggle to make a livelihood ? Always one had to ask oneself : to what end ? That I was not a combatant made no difference to my feelings. Life out of the trenches might be heaven compared to life in the trenches ; even so it was dreary enough.

Yet, such are the vagaries of luck, the War which cast its painful shadow over the whole of the country was to give me the most interesting and thrilling experience in my journalistic career—to be sent half-way round the world, and granted unforgettable glimpses of China, Japan, Manchuria and Siberia.

I spent nearly the whole of 1918 in the Far East as special correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, onlooker at a side-show fraught with momentous consequences for millions of people. What I am referring to is the confused activities of which the rescue of the seventy thousand Czech war prisoners, who were seeking to escape from Russia and the Bolsheviks, was one manifestation ; the attempt of Admiral Koltchak to establish a non-revolutionary government in Russia another ; and the efforts of the Allies to prevent Germany from eating up what resources were to be found in Siberia yet a third.

Could one dream of a stranger adventure than to leave London thousands of miles behind, and be in Siberia when it swarmed with the armed troops of seven or eight nationalities, and was the

background to the incredible anabasis of the Czecho-Slovak legionaries ?<sup>1</sup>

Adding its own deep interest to the crazy human drama staged in the stark Siberian steppes, was the uncertain fate of an enormous golden treasure drifting insecurely from Europe into Asia ; now under the control of the Czechs, now in the hands of Koltchak's unreliable troops. We who live in settled lands have become accustomed to the wanderings of great masses of gold ; our own Mr. Montagu Norman has usually a good reason to offer for the bewildering phenomenon of the movement of gold from one country to another. But the Russian hoard moved in response to no exchange, banking or trade balance influences, but was the rich prize in a duel of strength between two contending systems, Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik ; a prize not lightly to be despised, seeing that it was the equivalent of seventy millions sterling. Though for months on end tossed to and fro on an ever-shifting battlefield, the treasure by the greatest of miracles remained intact, surviving infinite perils and the always menacing contiguity of the world's greediest rascals.

London had a finger in this Far Eastern effervescence, and was sensitive to the various developments, charged as they were with important results to the cause for which Britain fought. Lloyd

<sup>1</sup> After the peace of Brest Litovsk, the Czech soldiers naturally expected to be allowed to leave Russia. Some originally had joined up as voluntary Allies, while others, rather than fight against their Slav brethren, had surrendered as war prisoners. Stalin had actually agreed to let them go, but the Germans, loathing the idea of Russia's former war prisoners fighting against them in Europe, which was the intention, induced the Bolsheviks to interpose every obstacle between the Czechs and their march to the sea.

It was realisation of the danger in which the Czech legionaries stood that induced America to send out troops to the Far East, and also prompted Britain to lend what few troops she could spare for the same purpose. Whether the danger to which the Czechs were exposed has been exaggerated, must always remain a matter of opinion. There is, at any rate, little positive evidence to confirm the oft-repeated statement that the bulk of the non-Slav war prisoners were anxious to join the Bolsheviks, and turn on the Czechs, irrespective of the fact that they had no arms. Some Austrians and Hungarians did throw in their lot with the Bolsheviks, but it is arguable that they were never numerous enough to become a formidable factor. Yet, when all the facts of the situation are carefully weighed up, it is obvious that, even to withstand the Bolsheviks alone, the Czechs had all their work cut out. When I arrived, Professor Masaryk's countrymen were astride the Siberian railway line, and already one detachment under General Dietrichs had worked through to Vladivostok. At Hong-Kong several vessels stood by, awaiting orders to convey the Czechs to Europe, but as they did not leave Siberia until many months later, these particular allied transports were never required.

George's solicitude for the safety of the Czechs, fighting their way through Russia to the sea of Japan, was shared and endorsed by President Wilson, and throughout fanned by the active and effective propaganda of President Masaryk, working from simple lodgings in Hampstead.

While the calculations of the different Allies largely followed a national bent, our own aim was to stimulate the anti-Bolshevik forces in the Far East, and encourage the Japanese (with many thousands of first-rate troops only thirty hours' sailing away) to release armed numbers in sufficient strength to detain considerable German forces on the Russian Front.

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When I arrived in the Far East, H.M. Cruiser *Suffolk*, under Commodore Payne, had already anchored in the Vladivostok roads, and with Japanese assistance was protecting the valuable stores originally landed to munition a Russian army loyal to the *Entente*. Now they were being guarded against the danger of falling into the hands of the Germans. Admiral Koltchak had reached Harbin and was preparing to organise the anti-Soviet elements in Manchuria and Siberia. Deprived of his command when the Black Sea Fleet mutinied, Koltchak had come to England to plead with Jellicoe to be given a chance of serving with the British. As a result of his appeal he had been sent to the Mesopotamian Front of the Indian Army. But before he reached India, all his plans had been dramatically changed at the instance of M. Sazonoff, the former Russian Foreign Minister, who urged that he would be better employed in leading the anti-Bolshevik forces in the Far East. That the Allies should want to see the Bolsheviks routed, was due to the belief, mistaken or otherwise, that they were prepared to allow the Germans to help themselves to supplies of Russian oil and wheat.

Lord Northcliffe sent me out to the Far East, because he believed that we should see the Eastern Front re-formed and a large Japanese army in action. As he was in the closest touch with the Government, this expectation must have been shared by Downing Street.

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Before receiving my passport I had to undergo at New Scotland Yard a minute medical examination. Owing to our declining manpower, the meshes of the net were constantly being drawn tighter. While I waited my turn, a thin-looking tailor was being tested. I heard him tell the examiners the nature of his trade. "Ah," was their congratulatory reply, as they finished running over him,

"tailors invariably make the best soldiers." Having given him a resounding slap on the buttocks, they sent him back to the dressing-room, passed as fit.

I was given a C.3 card, and there being now no difficulty over a passport sailed away immediately, leaving Liverpool in an American steamer. We were not in any convoy. After leaving the Irish coast we went on our way alone. On advice I bought a special life-saving waistcoat, which on being filled with air was warranted to keep the wearer afloat for an indeterminate number of hours, always provided he did not die of pneumonia.

In my case it was money wasted. I did not attempt to wear the ingenious contraption. Instead I pinned my faith to the ordinary life-belt, which was much less trouble to put on. I was insured by the office, so that if the U-boats got me there would be £2000 for my family.

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Since it was impossible with any measure of accuracy to predict the course of events in the Far East, I was given an entirely free hand, the office trusting me to see that its enterprise was suitably rewarded. What money I needed was cabled, care of the Yokohama Specie Bank. Actually I received £6000 in three lots of £2000 each. Most of the money went to pay for telegrams in Siberia—3s. 6d. a word. A message that ran to three hundred words meant an expenditure of nearly £50. In Japan, China and Manchuria I used *Daily Mail* passes, and when the news was worth it I cabled at urgent rates, which brought the cost up to 11s. a word.

To telegraph from a Russian office called for the patience of Job, so long did they take to count the words and estimate the cost. I got over the difficulty by leaving with the Vladivostok office a deposit big enough to cover a month's messages, thus obviating a dreary waste of time. When I had occasion to use urgent rates, 11s. a word, I adopted every conceivable form of abbreviation, and on my return I was assured by Douglas Crawford, the Foreign Editor (since retired), that deciphering my skeletonised messages was worse than interpreting the most complicated cryptogram.

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On the Japanese steamer that took me from San Francisco to Yokohama I became friendly with a number of companionable Americans, some of whom were connected with the Consular service. As the Californian coast-line receded from view I ventured to inquire, as a matter of simple curiosity and to make conversation, whether there were any fortifications. Instantly

I raised a hornets' nest round my head. I was warned that the unfortunate and ill-considered remark had been taken amiss by several of the passengers. They thought it would be well to find out whether I was a spy. Amongst the sharpest-witted people on earth, I must confess, I had not bargained for such a crudely suspicious psychology. Though I succeeded in satisfying the alarmed American patriots that I had no evil designs against their Pacific coast-line, it gave me a rude shock to realise that, though we might speak the same language, we belonged to different nationalities whose interests and sympathies were not necessarily identical.

In Tokio I found that the Japanese populace knew little and cared less about Britain's war effort, being more concerned with the increase, at our expense, of their overseas trade, to which, handicapped as we were by our war exertions, we could present no effective obstacle. Tempting inducements to deal with hostile or suspicious neutral agencies were frustrated by Sir Edward Crowe,<sup>1</sup> then commercial Counsellor to the Embassy at Tokio, who, by the mere threat of pillorying the offenders in the Black List, held them off, though such was his tact that he was to leave no bad feeling behind.

Because of the frankness of his utterances, the interview I obtained with Baron Goto, the Japanese Foreign Minister, was regarded by Lord Northcliffe as a great achievement. This suave statesman answered all my questions without the slightest hesitation. None was too embarrassing. My surprise was all the greater, since previous experience with Japanese diplomats had not encouraged the hope of much frankness.

At the time of the Russo-Japanese peace negotiations at Portsmouth, U.S.A., Viscount Hayashi, the Japanese Ambassador in London, requested me to take down the following statement for publication :—

“ Viscount Hayashi, asked if he expected to receive the news of the final terms in the Russo-Japanese negotiations, replied : ‘ I do not even know if I shall know.’ ”

It was well worth taking out my note-book for so illuminating a statement !

No such mental subtlety and reserve characterised Baron Goto's

<sup>1</sup> Now Controller of the Department of Overseas Trade, richly deserved promotion.

dealings with me. He spoke with the brake off. First he explained why at the outbreak of the War the Germans made a friendly demonstration outside the Japanese Embassy in Berlin ; then he threw full light on the supposed pro-German leanings of the Japanese Army chiefs and their fondness for German military technique ; finally, that nothing should be left unsaid, calmly discussed the sentiments of his country in respect both to the Allies and the enemy.

After protesting that Japan's only wish was for a peaceful and well-ordered China, Baron Goto declared himself amused by a remark of mine that the Chinese people might not appreciate the benefits the Japanese were seeking to confer on them. "Missionaries," I had said, "had often been accused of making happy infidels miserable." And so we went on with question and answer, until there was sufficient matter on my book to fill two whole columns in the *Daily Mail*. At the finish the impression he made on me was that nothing short of an earthquake would upset Baron Goto. Generations of oriental calm and self-restraint had combined to produce in him a masterpiece of imperturbability.

But what stirred behind the mask of the spoken word and the frank countenance ? How near could a Westernised brain reach to genuine understanding of the trained Japanese mind ? To what extent might the European psychology grasp the spiritual and emotional forces separating East from West ? I would have liked an answer to these conundrums. But what time has a busy journalist for private mental satisfactions ? Something else called. Baron Goto, strange enigma for all his open face and apparently open mind, became a secondary interest and presently ceased to concern me in any way.

Meanwhile I was recovering from an aching, dislocated arm, the result of falling over a jinrickshaw carelessly left outside my Bank in Tokio. Kind and clever Japanese surgeons tended the limb, and to straighten it diverted my attention with some artfully contrived remark ; then applied a sudden measure of manipulation which was as effective as it was painful.

The climate of Peking impressed me tremendously, though it could not be compared with that of Manchuria, where the air was like a tonic. Of the famous city I remember most the ceaseless pitter-patter of the slippered Chinese advancing from their native quarters towards the European settlement, and the haunting sight of the tall, solitary, khaki-clad Sikh on duty outside the British Legation. That Sikh, monumental and inscrutable, was a picture to remind me of the extent to which the resources of the

Empire had been drained for men. Under the clear Chinese skies his lean figure blended with the peaceful landscape, so that even the rifle he carried had a subtle, decorative value. The graceful hands of Houdon or Dalou would have shaped out of rude clay an imperishable silhouette of that tall, lonely Sikh, in whose pose their sympathetic and inspired eyes would have seen a perfect theme.

An article I was writing lacked to complete it the phrase, "We shall meet at Canossa." Canossa eluded my memory. In desperation I turned for help to the Allied diplomats in Peking. With one accord they said, "Try M. de Martel, First Secretary of the French Legation. He is the scholar." They were right. In a trice he had furnished me with the wanted quotation.

I paid my respects to Dr. G. E. Morrison, formerly *The Times* correspondent, who had become political adviser to the Chinese President. He was living in a lovely palace the glories of which no journalist's home in England could ever hope to equal, and he smiled when I described the usual habitation of a newspaperman such as myself. It was the only time I saw him genuinely relax, for there hung about him a listlessness and a melancholy air which even the characteristic Northcliffe anecdotes I retailed at his request failed to remove. He must have been troubled by some premonition of his end, for he was to die in two years' time.

Harbin, the great trading city, magnificently situated on the Sungari River, junction for Europe, China, Manchuria and Siberia, was to share with Vladivostok the honours of being my home for several months. It was a constant puzzle to me how the magnificently accoutred Tsarist officers and their wives, lady-loves and dependents, found the money upon which to live.

Both in Harbin and Vladivostok the currency and hotel problems gave me a perpetual headache. The rouble was always liable to become worthless, yet without the rouble you could buy little or nothing on Russian soil. Also the Chinese money-changers were always thinking out some new trick to bleed you. I remember a week when unless one paid a heavy premium, it was almost impossible to obtain small change. The money-changers had cornered all coins of small denomination, and before they would release them required a premium of forty per cent.

In either city to ask for a bed at one of the better-class hotels was to risk being laughed at. You were supposed to know there

was never a room to let, never had been, and never would be. Determined not to sleep on the hard pavement of Harbin, I appealed to H. E. Sly, the British Consul. He rang up one of the hotel managers, and instead of pleading with him as I had done, used forcible arguments with the result that one of the "regulars" was evacuated. Eventually I found a room in an hotel which I permanently kept on. This room became known to many Britishers in the Far East, who took it over in my absence. At some of the smaller hotels the prospective client was advised to share a room with the permanent occupant, invariably of the opposite sex.

The unheard-of luxury of running water distinguished one hotel which I patronised. The water ran to such purpose that it splashed over the basin and on to the carpet. I warned the landlord that, unless the tap was mended, his carpet would be ruined. The next morning a man arrived, *looked* at the tap, and took the carpet away. The water continued to run over the basin on to the bare boards, but as the precious carpet was safe, the landlord worried no further.

At another hotel I was awakened at 3 a.m. by a terrible row outside my bedroom door. On the landing I found a Russian officer, booted and spurred, deep in a violent altercation with the terrified proprietor, whom he was threatening to run through with his sword, a prospect which the landlord did not appear to relish. To satisfy the curiosity of the assembled guests, the officer, who was white with rage, explained that he had had a rendezvous with a lady, but the landlord's bungling had so upset things that already he had been kept waiting an hour, an intolerable state of things for a man in his position. The obviously sympathetic murmurs which greeted his story must have gone home, for I heard no further noise, and assumed that the proprietor had made the *amende honorable*.

My first experience of Vladivostok was arriving there at midnight, and being driven about for over two hours in the vain search for a bedroom. The droschky-driver suggested I should call at the British Consulate. Instead of the resourceful (Sir) Robert Hodgson (until recently H.M. Minister in Albania) being angry at having his sleep disturbed at that unearthly hour, he showed himself most anxious to assist. In lieu of sleeping on the billiard table,<sup>1</sup> not the first time a Britisher in a similar plight had found salvation there, I was recommended to seek out Lieutenant

<sup>1</sup> In this billiard-room a refugee from the Bolsheviks recognised in Hodgson an old college chum, whom he had not seen since they were at Oxford together.



Stevani of the British Military Mission, quartered in a disused railway carriage on a siding. Somehow or other in the pitch-dark I found the particular carriage, and Stevani, a white man if ever there was one, agreed to let me take pot-luck with him. How thankful I was for his roof and shelter I need hardly say. Only when Colonel O'Connor,<sup>1</sup> formerly our Consul-General in Persia, who had been sent out by Lord Beaverbrook's official Propaganda Department, came along with a properly organised house run by efficient Chinese boys, was I able to revert to living accommodation of a more normal character. All the same I lacked for nothing in Stevani's railway compartment.

I have some vague memory of being introduced to William Gerhardi, who was attached to the staff of General Knox, chief of the British Military Mission. It was on things seen and imagined in Vladivostok that he based his amusing Russian-life novel, *Futility*.

"Cut-throat Avenue," the name given to a path in the country zoo, Whipsnade, was most applicable to the part of the town where the railway station was situated, being wholly infested with scoundrels. While entraining for Nikolsk I was pinned up against the wall of the carriage so that I could neither breathe nor move; thus disabled I was unable to prevent my pockets being rifled. The police listened to my complaint attentively, made copious notes in a ledger, then presumably dismissed the incident from their minds. They were historians rather than thief-catchers. Nobody had ever heard of a station thief being arrested, except by mistake, when he was set free with profuse apologies. Apart from these blemishes, Vladivostok in 1918 was one of the most interesting places in the world: an encampment for Allied soldiers of every description, Japanese, Americans, British, French, Italians, Russian peasant recruits, Czechs, not to mention Canadian mounted police and British and Japanese bluejackets. The patrols made up from all these diverse races were facetiously known as "Mixed Pickles."

The idea of a great Japanese landing in force never materialised owing to America suspecting that it would be easier to get a Japanese army *into* than *out of* Siberia. On the other hand the Americans were opposed to the idea of fighting the Russians, whatever their political complexion, but did not mind doing garrison duty and guarding the railways, so as to facilitate the escape of the Czech divisions struggling towards the sea. This policy sometimes led to illogical situations. Thus, when the

<sup>1</sup> Sir Frederick O'Connor, afterwards British Resident in Nepal.

members of the Swedish Red Cross Mission were murdered in their railway cars at Khabarovsk, the American troops, though part of the garrison, were forbidden to interfere in the internal affairs of Russia, and could take no steps to bring the guilty ones to justice. As for the Japanese, when it became a question of a notorious freebooter being tried by the local authorities for the murder of the Swedes, they pointed out that he was in charge of a military force under their orders and could not be considered amenable to a civil tribunal. The result of the American policy of "no interference" and the Japanese policy of "hands off" was to paralyse all action by the civil authority. Later, when the Americans moved into barracks in the Chita-Lake Baikal area, they exercised a beneficial control over the movements of Ataman Semenoff's untrustworthy lieutenants, which was in pleasing contrast to their former inactivity.

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On the whole it was remarkable that the Allies should have avoided grave trouble, seeing how sharply their respective aims and views conflicted. There were times in Vladivostok when, to use a phrase that Roosevelt once applied to Mexico, *peace raged furiously*, but with so many viewpoints to study, was it to be wondered at that things did not always go smoothly?

To be in Vladivostok during these feverish days of 1918 was to be eloquently reminded of Britain's long and apparently inexhaustible arm. I stood on the pavement of the dusty Svetlanskaja, the principal thoroughfare of Vladivostok, the day the 25th Middlesex, a B1 garrison battalion brought from Kong Kong, marched through. Though they were not among the physically finest of Britain's troops, yet the sight of their familiar honest, round Cockney faces in this outlandish corner of the earth, brought a genuine thrill to my home-sick heart, and that curious throb which something English met in an alien clime never fails to evoke. One's patriotic pride would have been flattered, had the splendidly set-up 9th Hants, a fine Territorial battalion fresh from service in India, been the first to arrive. Who could forget that the inhabitants of Vladivostok, whose listless eyes followed the slow march of "The Die-hards," had in their day heard the Svetlanskaja resound to the tread of the Tsar's best troops? And who could fail to make invidious comparisons between the admirable physique and bronzed pigmentation of the hardy Czech soldiers, and the moderate stamina and less healthy appearance of the Britishers.

Still if our Tommies did not look in the pink of condition,

they gave a sturdy account of themselves, keeping surprisingly well despite the rigours of the Siberian winter. They furnished the escort of Colonel John Ward, the navvies' M.P., on the way to Omsk, and at a critical moment surrounded the house where Koltchak was living. The British gesture of constituting themselves his guard caused the Russians to believe that he was the Allies' nominee; at the same time it dissolved Koltchak's final scruples about assuming the title of "Supreme Ruler." In the month of December when Siberia is not exactly a hot-house, the 9th Hants travelled up to Omsk in a train composed of cattle-trucks, arriving none the worse for their adventure. In Omsk itself they were quartered in an evacuated girls' school, and all through that Siberian winter they wore shorts without suffering any ill effects. Such general favourites were officers and Tommies with the native population, that at the funeral of Colonel Steel, the gunnery officer, the townsfolk turned out *en masse*.

Is it not a strange thought that in the remote Siberian town of Omsk are to be seen the graves of British soldiers, and that in many villages in the heart of Siberia one may still come across people, who remember our khaki-clad boys marching through with bands playing?

All the time I was in Vladivostok an Arabian Nights atmosphere of unreality overhung the astonishing life of the town. Marvelously handsome men, splendidly uniformed, who might have stepped out of musical comedy, or belonged to medieval pageantry, strutted up and down the streets. They were proud, they explained, to be officers of Koltchak's army, but one feared that some sad adversity chained them to these city pavements where no danger at all existed.

In the air rose and fell, like the chatterings of birds, a continuous whisper of gold—gold by the millions, a vast hoard flitting from place to place at the whim of unsubstantial governments which came and went with alarming rapidity. From 1917 onwards there had been talk of this gold—the original Russian State treasure. A whole year it had been on the march, starting with those critical days when the Germans threatened Petrograd. For safety sake, the gold had been taken to Kazan, where it was to fall into the hands of the Bolsheviks. Struggling to be free, the Czechs joined fortunes with an anti-Bolshevik group—"The People's Army"—organised from Samara. The combined forces captured Kazan and took possession of the treasure, which after a short halt at Samara was sent on the march again, a long trek ending only when Omsk was reached. In the vaults of the State Bank there, the treasure seemed to have found at last a permanent home, but

it was only one more halting place, for in the background the drama of the fight for Russia, which was to decide the gold's destination, pursued its uninterrupted course. At Omsk the Socialist Directoire of moderate opinions in which the Samara movement had been merged, was overturned by Koltchak, who, desirous of having the gold directly under his control, substituted his own, much less efficient, administration.

Was the treasure reality or myth? That no doubt should prevail on the subject, the Supreme Ruler allowed the vaults of the State Bank to be inspected by the Allied representatives.<sup>1</sup> They saw tier after tier of shelves stacked with wooden boxes such as one finds in grocery shops. Inside were dull nuggets of uniform size. Other boxes were crammed with gold coins of every nationality, from our own highly finished sovereign to Spanish twenty peseta and French twenty-franc pieces. The *clou* of the collection was a huge ball of gold, a foot in diameter.

The advice of the Allies to Koltchak was: "send the gold to the coast where it will be safe." Either he did not trust his friends, or he did not like being parted from his gold—whichever was the case, Koltchak could never make up his mind what to do. The gold trains were actually ready to start with the Hampshires as escort, when at the last moment, Koltchak, with characteristic indecision, declined to release the treasure. Two months later Omsk became untenable and definite steps to safeguard the gold had to be taken. Once more the fabulous hoard went on the march. Once more the whisper of gold being stealthily moved ran like a flame through all Siberia.

Eventually the gold trains reached Irkutsk, minus one or two cars mysteriously lost *en route*. Some time later, the Koltchak offensive having ignominiously collapsed, and the Admiral having been handed over to the Irkutsk revolutionaries, by whom he was to be tried and shot, the gold started on its wanderings again, which ended only when Moscow was reached. There its value was declared the equivalent of seventy millions sterling. Petty depredations and sundry payments to Shanghai and Tokio for Koltchak's military purchases had reduced the bulk, and some four hundred poods had been commandeered by Semenov, the not too-dependable ally of Koltchak, who naïvely explained that he thought the detained gold would be safer in his hands.

<sup>1</sup> Exhibiting the national gold is a Russian habit of which history has previous record. Years earlier the Tsarist government invited Charlie Hands, the accomplished special correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, to inspect the State hoard, and I recollect that his humorous narrative made mention of a solitary kopeck, which had dropped in that rich mass apparently by accident.

## CHAPTER XX

### SIBERIA'S LIGHTER SIDE

**D**ESPITE innumerable sins of omission and commission Admiral Koltchak undeniably belongs to history—not for what he did, which was little enough, but for what he dared, which was on the truly heroic scale. Had he succeeded in overthrowing the Bolsheviks and establishing a Central Government, who knows to what glories he might have reached! He failed, and, I am bound to say, dismally failed, being totally unfitted for a task that called for the towering genius of a Napoleon; yet the man and his efforts were sufficiently heroic to warrant mention in the chronicles devoted to valiant and illustrious enterprise.

The dignity of his last hours, a fitting close to his fate-haunted career, should ensure him a permanent monument, besides atoning for much that was pitifully weak. On hearing the death sentence pronounced by the Irkutsk revolutionary tribunal, he raised no murmur. He had gambled for high stakes and lost. What right had he to complain of the penalty? He offered cigarettes to his executioners, and on their hesitating to shoot, rallied them on their duty. "Fire," he commanded. "You have your orders—obey!" The spirit which prompted him to throw into the Black Sea the golden sword awarded him for valour, rather than surrender it to his mutinous following, remained unimpaired to the end, enabling him to die nobly, like a gentleman.

When first I saw Koltchak in the Far East, he was living in a railway train in a siding at Harbin. He had for attendant a batman with but a single idea in his head: on no pretext whatever must his master be disturbed. Seeing that he was getting the worst of a long, verbal, wrestling match with me, the fellow held out his hands appealingly, as one man to another, and exclaimed, "But, honoured sir, in an hour's time His Excellency will want to eat. How can I take you to him?"

I found Koltchak in a highly nervous condition, hopping about as if on hot bricks. When suddenly angered, he would stamp his

feet and smash pencils in his hand. I would describe him as a dark, wiry, spare sort of man, of medium height, dressed at all times in naval uniform. When his features were at rest, which was seldom, they wore the sad and mournful aspect of a religious ascetic of the fifteenth century. His main fault was to be totally void of that insight into popular psychology, with which, so Trotsky tells us, the conquering Lenin was abundantly endowed; hence the sterile nature of his appeal to the masses, from whom he should have derived the main support of his movement. Many of the officers enlisted in his cause were more of a liability than an asset. Having little stomach for fighting, they preferred the warm hearth of headquarters to the discomforts of the battle front, and so were not of the slightest use to Koltchak, who, it must be admitted, had few qualifications for being a popular leader. Shy and taciturn by nature, he hated mingling with the simple Siberian people, and only while dominated by the democratic Colonel John Ward did he attempt to win over the masses by the arts of persuasion.

If the ideas of "a mighty united Russia" and "a constitutional monarchy" meant anything to these rough-fibred peasants, they signified the return of the old, unpopular regime. So when Koltchak's recruiting officers visited the villages, and sought to induce the Siberian youth to join up, they were liable to emerge with their noses slit and their ears cut off. On the other hand, one would come across a Siberian farmer arguing in this calculating fashion: "I have a son with the Bolsheviks and another with Koltchak. On the whole the Bolsheviks pay better. If I have to choose, then I am for the Bolsheviks." Though heavily dependent on the help of the Czechs, the Admiral was so badly wanting in tact as to be constantly referring to them as "our war prisoners." An enraged Czech general actually smacked his face.

Of a truth the Czechs did not like Koltchak, and he had no more love for them. Worse, the Czechs loathed his administration which they regarded as reactionary, preferring the more liberal Directoire which he overthrew. They saw justice non-existent and the prisons crowded with miserable wretches arrested for imaginary offences, or held on the mere suspicion of being less than 100 per cent loyal. They saw civil officials, selected in the most haphazard fashion, prove in practice as incompetent and corrupt as the most venal of Koltchak's officers.

The American ambassador in Tokio, Mr. Morris, whom I remember for the extraordinary amount of gold dental work in his mouth, advised that no extra financial aid should be extended to Koltchak, *as his Government was hated by 99 per cent of the population.*

The contention of the Czechs, as they abandoned the Admiral to his fate, was that it was better for one man to die than for the whole of their number to perish. Unless they delivered him up, they could hope for no supplies of coal or any transport, and without such assistance there was no hope of their reaching the coast in safety. Apart from the question of self-preservation, their interest was not in Russia, nor in the particular kind of government the Russian people favoured, but in an independent Czechoslovakia, where they wished to be without more vexatious months of delay.

Though of loftier mental stature, Koltchak was not nearly so interesting and picturesque a character as his unreliable ally, the Ataman Semenoff, who had magnetism, sex appeal and many of the attractive, dare-devil qualities of Raleigh or Drake. This romantic *condottiere* was of mixed Buryat and Cossack descent, his mother being a Mongolian noble. The two strains united in him to produce an adventurous and ambitious intriguer. He ran a motley crowd of armed gallants of many races, and for the most part subsisted on grants from the Japanese, though he was not above taking help from any of the Allies. The British Legation in Peking, for instance, sent him artillery and a certain amount of funds. His attractive mouth, gleaming white teeth, Napoleonic curl, soldierly demeanour and rakish air went well in the streets of Vladivostok. What a fluttering in susceptible feminine breasts there was, whenever his neatly fitting Cossack uniform and clanking sword were spotted in the bustling Svetlanskaia! His first wife was a young gipsy called Masha, a former café-chantant artiste, and while she was lying by his side in bed, the Ataman received the Allied representatives who were paying him a call. Differences arose between the pair, and the temperamental lady was handed five poods of gold and sent on her way. She made for Paris and spent all her money in open-handed charity, mostly in succouring distressed Russian officers.

As second wife, Semenoff chose a blue-eyed damsel of sixteen, fresh from a girls' gymnasium. Dressed in rich sables, which set off her striking beauty, she made her a fitting consort for the handsome Cossack. Hospitality was a marked feature of Semenoff's character. He invited Hodgson, the British Consul, to a lunch that began at one o'clock in the afternoon and concluded at midnight, when the guests went to the theatre. True, at intervals Cossacks played with bears, and the less torpid members of the party danced.

The Americans regarded the Ataman as a thoroughly "bad egg," but in ordinary life he was a kindly enough man, generous and tractable, if properly handled. He could be cruel, like many Russians, and he could tolerate in his camp unscrupulous and merciless ruffians, whose crimes were to sully his own reputation. But to be fair to Semenoff, one has to remember what Russia was like in those days. As a warring chieftain you killed your enemy, or were killed yourself. Every man's hand was against his neighbour. Semenoff was in the field against the Bolsheviks long before Koltchak arrived in Siberia, but, ever tactless, that imperious commander treated him in an offhand manner, as though he were an upstart, and actually issued an order degrading him. Only when he was about to die, did the Admiral make amends. He appointed Semenoff his successor.

Encamped at Chita, which is close to the frontiers of Mongolia, Semenoff chose what he thought was a suitable time to proclaim himself Emperor of Mongolia, but soon had to fly for his life. A waiting aeroplane landed him safely in Harbin. Before leaving Siberia, "out of patriotic indignation,"—I use his own words—he disposed of all his portable stores, including goods later claimed by Liverpool, Leeds and American firms. The Americans, suing him in the Chinese courts for the cost of furs and other goods missing from their warehouses, were awarded heavy damages.

In April, 1922, the Ataman paid a visit to New York with his charming wife, and, much to his surprise, was arrested at the instance of the exporters who had obtained judgment against him. To provide bail for her husband, Mme Semenoff had to pledge her wonderful pearls. Meanwhile, in his easy way, the philosophic *condottiere* was explaining that he could not be expected to remember what he seized in those hectic days in Siberia. Sometimes the Bolsheviks stole from him; sometimes he stole from them. As the American courts could not act on a judgment obtained in China, he was released. Some time later the Soviet papers reported him as having been killed in a Japanese earthquake. They were wrong. He was very much alive at Nagasaki, where he was carrying on a prosperous business in hides. On the plea that he was the successor of Admiral Koltchak, and as such legally entitled to the assets possessed by the Omsk Government, he drew substantial sums from Japan. On the other hand there is little doubt that the Koltchak gold intended for Tokio, which he had detained *en route*, eventually found its way to its rightful owners.



Koltchak's widow stayed for a time in Brighton ; then crossed to Paris to become, like Masha, a member of the large Russian colony.

The one-armed officer Pechkoff, attached to the French High Command in Omsk, was among the romantic figures I met in Siberia. A delightful conversationalist and a man of great charm, he was, though few suspected the fact, the adopted son of Maxim Gorki, the Russian novelist. When the Far Eastern mess was cleared up, he returned to France and eventually married a French Countess.

The humorous side of the War in Vladivostok could easily provide a light pen with material for a dozen pages. One morning the worthy citizens were startled by the sight of a muscular Amazon, proud as a peacock, strutting about the main streets—in trousers. She was the leader of the women's shock battalion, who had escaped from Moscow. What was originally a war expedient had now become a settled habit. Nothing would induce her to drape her ample thighs in other than the objectionable breeches. Threats and appeals were equally useless. Only when she wanted to leave the country did the prayers of the outraged authorities succeed. They pointed out that, to dress so conspicuously, was to defeat her only hope of evading the watchful eyes of the Bolsheviks. Her eyes red from weeping, she finally ventured forth a shy and embarrassed creature in the conventional attire of her sex, having first consigned the beloved trousers, weighted with stones, to the waters of the deep blue sea.

Almost as great a commotion was caused by the arrival of a younger and infinitely more attractive Russian maiden, *en route* for Japan where she was to visit friends. The Passport Control Office, concluding that she was a dangerous German agent, a Russian Mata Hari carrying secret instructions, detained her. Tenderly worded missives in her possession showed her to be on the friendliest terms with high-placed foreign representatives in Petrograd. But whatever construction could be put on the relationships, they provided no justification for an indefinite "hold-up." Accordingly an order for the lady's release was signed. Greatly relieved she boarded the boat for Tsuruga. No sooner did she appear on deck than she was instantly set upon again, hauled off to the bathroom, and washed and scraped for hours. Alas ! that so much zeal should be wasted. No messages in invisible ink appeared on her person. Under the most severe tests, the lady's fair form retained its innocence.

The effect of so many foreign troops using Vladivostok as a base was to confer tremendous additional spending power on the town. The new-comers with their reliable currencies were at a great advantage compared with the native Russians, whose roubles had a constantly declining value. Thus handicapped, the local bachelors, or perhaps it would be better to say the bohemian elements, found themselves deserted by the local flirts and coquettes. In the matter of entertaining the attractive Russian maidens, they could not afford to spend one-fifth as much as the alien "mashers" with their cheaply bought roubles.

The disparity of their means, and the consequent loss of the soothing feminine society to which they were accustomed, tended to make the Russians morose and resentful, and at one time the serious step of an informal protest to the Allied consuls was contemplated. Only the fear of overwhelming themselves with ridicule appears to have held them back, for what diplomatic action could have forced a pretty young woman, who could now ride in a carriage, to cast indulgent eyes on a compatriot who made her walk on the uneven pavements? For my part I felt extremely sorry for the embarrassed native manhood, remembering how few opportunities there were for congenial amusement in Vladivostok.

When I arrived, nude sea-bathing common to most parts of Russia was in full swing. Fathers and mothers marched into the water with their families, blissfully unconscious of any sense of awkwardness. Whether for sea-bathing or sun-bathing, the fully-exposed human form presented no hindrance to social life. But the advent of the Allied troops caused a subtle difference in the attitude of the women bathers. With true coquettish instinct they took to stylish bathing dresses, hastily procured from sedate Japan, and I, for one, thought the change an improvement.

Overlooking one of the bathing stations towered Tiger Hill. In the days when the ladies breasted the foam in the costume of Mother Eve, whenever I passed Tiger Hill, central point of the Siberian Lido, I was sure to find, perched on the topmost knoll, a solitary Chinaman, a little basket of food—rice and a piece of chicken—by his side, surveying with slits of eyes the animated scene below. If he drew any satisfaction from the lively and frolicsome spectacle, it was not betrayed in his face, which remained stolid and expressionless, as though carved in stone.

Having much time on my hands I devoted a good deal of practice to the Russian language, in which, with the help and assistance of a

good and persistent teacher, I became tolerably proficient. The manual I was given to study had typical sentences for beginners, arranged in the order of their usefulness. The first sentence read " I love you " (*ya vas lublu*).

One afternoon, leaving the Solitary Dog (Russian : *Solitaire Rog*) restaurant, I was approached by a bearded comrade, or tavarisch, who asked permission to ventilate a grievance. He was of the genuine proletariat, while I was obviously of the bourgeoisie. Yet he thought himself lucky to secure three miserable meals a week and that in the most wretched surroundings, while I ate and drank daily to repletion, the menu extending to such luxuries as caviare and roast Manchurian mutton, good cabbage soup and warming Kvass. Would I unravel the dark riddle? I said : " there is an explanation, but it would take me too long to shape it into words. I will be returning to Vladivostok in twenty-five years' time and will then have it ready. Meanwhile, here's ten roubles for you ; go and sample the best the *Solitaire Rog* can offer you."

Whenever in doubt the Russian workmen went on strike. At Harbin the Czechs required a train to take them to Vladivostok, but found that the engine-driver had taken a sudden dislike to them and quitted his cab. Locating him, they applied a revolver to his head in the manner of a poultice, explaining that if steam were not up in fifteen minutes and the train ready to start, his wife would be a widow. The engine-driver expressed himself convinced by the argument and resumed his place by the engine plate.

On the whole my adventures in Siberia left me little cause for complaint, but the Japanese gave me one nasty jar. With official permission I had boarded a Japanese open truck, drawn by an engine that was going up the line. A truculent corporal with pointed bayonet ordered me off. As I declined to budge, the little man prepared to jab at me, but his mates, to whom I showed my British passport full of *visa* marks, pulled him away. Had I been of another nationality, I have not the slightest doubt there would have been a regrettable incident, leading probably to an exchange of diplomatic views.

Little unpleasantnesses will occur whatever precautions are taken. For several hours a Japanese junior lieutenant detained the train in which General Knox was travelling. On representations being made to the Higher Command, word came back that

what had been done *exceeded expectations*—sincere enough explanation, though the English might have been better.

In July, 1918, the Tsar and his family were murdered in a cellar at Ekaterinburg. The news slowly filtered through to the most outlying parts of Siberia without any repercussion of horror or indignation. Long years of brutal happenings had robbed the inhabitants of any sense of shame, and I found not only a complete absence of emotion, but an unmistakable eagerness to have done with the subject. A few "Whites" may have regretted the Royal massacre; otherwise the bulk of the people were unmoved. They hated the old despotic regime, and were as little saddened by the dreadful end of the Romanoffs as the Parisians were by the execution of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI. Even the *intelligentsia* with whom I attempted to discuss the tragedy of the Tsar and his family were callously unconcerned. The history of Russia, they said, was full of atrocious happenings, not confined to the Throne alone.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A LONG-LIVED RACE OF EDITORS

**J**UST as I was getting nicely acclimatised, and was looking forward with pleasurable excitement to wearing the warm winter clothes I had bought—a sealskin cap, and an overcoat lined with civet cat and cotton wool, collar of sealskin—a cable came ordering me back to London. It read: "you are wanted immediately for important and urgent work." As I took my leave, I remarked to some of the British officers, "I am sure that in London they think the end of the War is at hand, and mean me for a peace job." Whether or not I interpreted the mind of London rightly, the fact remains that within three weeks of the receipt of the cable the War was over and Europe's agony ended. With the assistance of the British Consulate I was able to convert my stock of roubles into yen, thereby avoiding the loss of several hundreds of pounds, for the Russian money soon became worthless. The first part of my journey was *via* Tsuruga, Yokohama and Vancouver. Shipping being scarce, I had the utmost difficulty in securing a berth, even on a small cargo steamer. To my intense discomfiture, we experienced the full force of the terrific gales to which the Pacific is often liable. I left too hurriedly to get my passport in order, and it was entirely owing to the energetic representations at Washington of W. F. Bullock, the *Daily Mail* New York correspondent (since retired), that I was given a special State department *visa* to enable me to land in America.

Armistice Day found me at the *Knickerbocker*, most delightful of New York hotels, now unhappily no more. On the floor above me, quite by accident, I discovered my old *Evening News* colleague, Albert de Courville, already a famous and prosperous revue producer, and over breakfast we discussed our respective experiences since we were on the *Evening News* together.

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That the War had been won, I gathered from the noise and enthusiasm which assailed my senses. We had inconveniently won it a day too early, or a day too late, for to thread my way through the ecstatic, cheering crowds to the Cunard dock took

me a whole afternoon, and I well remember the expression of relief on the taxi-driver's face when I paid his fare. Mine-sweeping operations in mid-Atlantic delayed our immediate sailing. Two whole days were thus consumed. Meanwhile, in Carmelite House, unconscious of the obstacles I was encountering, Lord Northcliffe was issuing daily bulletins with the slogan: "has anybody seen Falk?"

Aboard ship I met Bishop Gore, an ardent controversialist always ready to enter into any reverently conducted argument. We discussed some of the passages in the New Testament, and I said to him: "please explain to me in logical terms the saying, 'I and my Father are one.'" But the good Bishop thought simple faith a better medium of understanding than subtle logic. After his retirement from the Birmingham-Oxford sees, I would often come across Dr. Gore in the neighbourhood of Eaton Terrace. Hands muffled in his sleeves, lips moving as if in silent communion with his inward thoughts, he would be taking his favourite walk through the quieter West-end streets. There was an earnestness and a terrific conviction about the man that shone in his thin, spiritualised face, and leapt in his thin body. If I could never follow his mental processes, his sincerity always went direct to my soul.

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At Liverpool the happy-go-lucky method of unloading passengers' luggage made me fear for the safety of two crates of curios—costly spoils from the Far East. To placate the heavy-handed vandals who dealt with the baggage, I offered the handsome bribe of a sovereign, on condition that no damage was done. Whereupon in the expressive patois of the men of brawn I became "Bill's special." "Bill's specials" were fortunate people who did not have their luggage smashed.

In my wallet was four hundred pounds, which large sum, representing unused expenses, I returned to the office. I sometimes wonder whether in this specialised connection the amount does not constitute a record, though to a firm like the Associated Newspapers, with its a net income of a million a year and more, four hundred pounds is a mere flea-bite. After a few complimentary remarks on my work, Lord Northcliffe went straight to the point. "Well, Falk, have you remembered to bring me back a piece of lucky jade from China?" Fortunately I had remembered, and the sight of the Ming drinking cup, specially secured for him, gave Lord Northcliffe a pleasure altogether out of proportion to

the value of the gift. When I was asked what I would like in return, I expressed the hope that the usual service of cigars would be resumed, to which remark the Chief replied, that in anticipation of my return, he had bought a cheap Jamaican consignment.

The urgent and important work for which I had been called home was reporting the Khaki election for the *Daily Mail*. It seemed queer that though I was many thousands of miles away, possibly deep in the Siberian *taiga* or shrub for all the office knew of my movements, I should be earmarked for this essentially home front job, but the explanation was quite simple. Lord Northcliffe and the Editor, Thomas Marlowe, remembered my Secret History connection with politics. I was the only available journalist on the staff who had specialised in political writing, for though the War was over, it took time to get men demobilised.

When I had completed this new task, quite a change from reporting the movements of Koltchak, I looked forward with eagerness to another interesting mission abroad. I was anxious to see more of the world. The free life of a special newspaper correspondent, with ample resources at his disposal, appealed to me. I wanted to write, to see history in the making, to take my fill of the thrills which this department of journalism offers. But Lord Northcliffe had other plans in view. He said I had done enough roving and must now do some real work. I was to succeed Swaffer, who throughout the arduous and difficult period of the War had acted as Editor of the *Weekly Dispatch*, transforming the paper from a budget of weekly news into a lively up-to-the-minute journal.

Lord Northcliffe meant to do me a kindness, but I am not sure that his decision did not deflect the natural course of my bent, which was towards writing, and not executive work. I had had enough experience of Sunday paper editors to know that I was not entering on any sinecure, and I was sufficiently conversant with the light-hearted anecdotage that had gathered round the *Weekly Dispatch* editorial line of succession to fear my own contribution. That this anecdotage had been largely swollen by after-dinner reminiscence, which generally meant a highly imaginative handling of the truth, did not alter the fact that in those hectic days the career of a *Dispatch* editor was regarded by Fleet Street as somewhat precarious.

Just as the sun never sets on the British Empire, so it is never supposed to set on the scattered army of *ex-Dispatch* editors. Somewhere the solar rays fall on a legionary of this scarred and battle-proven host. Like old soldiers, *ex-Dispatch* editors never

die. In my Fleet Street day I have counted nearly thirty who have held the chair, including Sir Evelyn Wrench, proprietor of *The Spectator*; Claude Taylor of the Department of Overseas Trade; at least one golf Secretary, and two or three journalists who were later to edit *Reynolds's* for Lord Dalziel.

Swaffer used to inform unsuspecting visitors to Carmelite House that the heads of historical celebrities adorning the stairways were those of his predecessors. The current anecdotage speaks of Editors of the *Dispatch* who have lasted but three days; of others who were to regard five weeks in the editorial chair as a lasting achievement. Separating the wheat from the chaff there remains the immortal story of that luckless colleague of mine, who on telling Lord Northcliffe on the telephone that he was the Editor of the *Dispatch*, was gently corrected: "no, Mr.—, not Editor; ex-Editor, please."

I remember a morning when leaving my home in Westminster, quite unprepared for any shocks, I ran into an ex-Editor of the *Dispatch* in St. James's Park, into a second at the Royal Academy, into a third in Leicester Square, and into a fourth on the Embankment, whereupon to break the bewitchment I prudently took cover in a tea-shop. I remember a year when the experiment of twin editors was tried on the *Dispatch*, following the example of a society hostess who had installed twin baths in her home. The honourable "bosses" sat side by side. A humble reporter at the time, I took orders from the one which were promptly cancelled by the other. Between the two I managed to have nothing in the paper, and most earnestly prayed that the practice of twin editors would not spread to other journals, else I should have to seek a new form of livelihood.

Of all the *Dispatch* Editors I have worked with, Swaffer was easily the wittiest and most daring. The least quoted of his witticisms was probably the best. When there was a question of waking up some reporter whose "copy" was being questioned, Swaffer remarked: "let lying dogs sleep." As Editor, Swaffer had followed Lieut. M. A. F. Cotton, who was to fall gallantly in the Great War. Poor Cotton never had much opinion of me, but that did not blind me to his amiable and sterling qualities.

That in all I lasted thirteen years, first under Lord Northcliffe, then under Lord Rothermere, was clear proof that the short-life



superstition, if it ever had any real basis in fact, had been shattered for good, and, henceforth would exist only in the fantastic imagination of the Carmelite wits.

If the art of life, as Nietzsche says, is to live dangerously, then I could claim to have attained fulfilment, for as one of Lord Northcliffe's editors I hung over the edge of a precipice, or, to vary the metaphor, never knew what the day would bring forth. When worried by my shortcomings, he threatened to "fire" me, only my reasoning tongue saved me. If he never got so far as to inquire whether I would like a presentation gold watch, most ominous gesture of all, he certainly did his best to give me the jumps, and, as he phrased it, to spoil my lunch for that particular day. But early vicissitudes had taught me to accept all that comes in a spirit of fatalistic calm, to assume with the American humorist that half the trouble in the world never happens. Irrespective of these arguments, the kindnesses I was to receive from Lord Northcliffe handsomely compensated me for the inevitable shocks which were part of the penalty of being in the service of an incalculable genius.

In the last years of his life the Chief was usually to be seen in his small but comfortable room at *The Times* office. To pass from Carmelite House to Printing House Square was like accompanying Professor Piccard on a balloon trip: the air gradually became cooler and the pull of the earth progressively less. Often when I visited *The Times* office to take down "Secret History," Geoffrey Dawson, the forceful and brilliant Editor, whose quiet but energetic movements always favourably impressed me, would come into the room with a proof for the Chief to read, and leave again without much conversation passing. Unless my fancy deceived me, there was resentment in the cold penetrating eye of Geoffrey Dawson, as though he appeared to regard my presence as an impudent intrusion into the sacred portals. On the other hand, the unflattering truth may be that his mind was too occupied with his pressing responsibilities to notice who was with Lord Northcliffe. I could not afford to be indifferent as to what was happening on *The Times*, for there was a period when, feeling himself overworked, the Chief proposed selling the *Dispatch* and taking me on *The Times* as Super-features Editor, my job being to secure dignified circulation-raisers. With the Chief dead and gone, how long, I wonder, should I have lasted on *The Times* in that or in any other capacity. With the much travelled Wickham Steed, who for a period succeeded Dawson,<sup>1</sup> I was on

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Geoffrey Dawson resumed the editorship of *The Times*, when on the death of Lord Northcliffe the great journal passed under the control of Major the Hon. J. J. Astor, M.P.

friendlier terms, but prudently I kept in my own constellation, a brightly twinkling, diminutive star.

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As Lord Northcliffe grew older he became conscious of a certain loneliness of spirit, and I was pressed into the service of affording him a little light relief with my chit-chat. I would be required to accompany him on motor-rides, a notable occasion being his visit of sympathy to Mrs. Hawker, when her husband, the Atlantic airman, was reported missing.<sup>1</sup> Lord Northcliffe warned me at the outset of the journey that his throat was bad, and that I would be required to do all the talking, but by the time we reached Westminster Bridge, three minutes at the utmost, I could tell by the bored look on his face that he had had enough of my eloquence and was dying to exercise his own. Therefore, I was well prepared for the inevitable explosion, "For God's sake, young man, don't jabber so." For the rest of the journey he monopolised the talking, and I saw no evidence of any throat embarrassment.

Some days later I was taken to Hampstead to be shown the house where, in his unforgettable phrase, "My mother brought up seven children." During the drive Lord Northcliffe excused himself from smoking on the same old plea—his throat was out of sorts. But that must not hinder me from smoking. Rather timidly, as if sensing danger, I helped myself to a cigar. After the first few puffs he asked me what I thought of it. I said it was quite a good cigar. At the next half dozen puffs he coughed. I was more careful where I blew the smoke. Still he coughed. I allowed the cigar merely to burn. A fit of coughing, louder than ever, followed. I opened the window and threw the cigar out. As the familiar glint of mischievous satisfaction stole into the corner of his eye, the lines of his mouth perceptibly relaxed, and I could almost imagine that he smiled. "What a man!" I thought, surveying him from the opposite side of the car. At the end of the journey he remarked, "Now you *shall* smoke. Put a couple of cigars in your pocket."

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In these amusing encounters no question of personal dignity was ever involved. I enjoyed the fun quite as much as the Chief, well knowing that he only joked with the people he liked. Life

<sup>1</sup> After several days of anxious suspense it was announced, to the great relief of the nation, that her husband had been picked up by a Danish tramp steamer 14½ hours out from Newfoundland.

can be dull enough, in all conscience, without one going out of one's way to quarrel with opportunities for light interludes such as his impish personality supplied. Temperamentally I was efficiently corseted against quickly ruffled feelings. But in those last trying years when the nerves of the Chief were on edge owing to his unfortunate quarrel with Lloyd George, principally what weighed with me was the desire to hear him laugh and make light of the fact that the world could be a tiresome place. If my broad humour and occasional sallies might take his mind off more disturbing things, it were surely worth while chancing his occasional outbursts.

In a small way I did what I could to restore peace between Lord Northcliffe and Lloyd George. A final attempt at reconciliation,<sup>1</sup> to which, quite unknown of course to Lord Northcliffe, I lent myself, seemed to offer a slight chance of success, but nothing came of the effort, and the fatal quarrel persisted until death had removed one of the two powerful personalities.

Though my old Chief might often feel provoked to excessive criticism, yet his true nature condemned partisan attacks. As he wrote to me, "We must be careful not to involve ourselves in wrong quarrels with the Prime Minister. I have no personal interest in him either way. When he is vigorous in fighting Germany I support him: when he sings his 'Be kind to poor little Germany' song, I oppose him. I notice a tendency in the Staffs of my Newspapers to hit back when the Prime Minister makes foolish remarks about me. I deprecate that attitude. Silence is a more effective and dignified weapon."

Still fresh in the public memory will be the celebrations associated with the twenty-fifth birthday of the *Daily Mail*, when on Lord Northcliffe's instructions a record of the paper's achievements was prepared and sold at a shilling a copy. The title, "History of the *Daily Mail*", would not in his opinion persuade the public to buy it. To excite their curiosity it must be christened, "Mystery of the *Daily Mail*." The illustrations included the portraits of the directors, and as I was to be in that gallery of worthies I was urged to avail myself of the services of a skilful photographer, to wit Arbuthnot of Bond Street. The Art Editors—Baker who went to Australia, and Marshall who remained—had the line of my nose improved with Chinese white, so that I might look as impressive as the others. When my picture appeared I could easily have been mistaken for a stage hero.

<sup>1</sup> I made this attempt at the suggestion of the late Sir Leicester Harmsworth.

Never before had my close resemblance to Ivor Novello or Owen Nares been so strongly suspected, which only goes to show that, given a dab of Chinese white and a dexterous retoucher, the worst of us can be made to look in print like so many Adonises.

I was reminded of this experience on receiving from a distinguished personage an article, accompanied by a photograph, on the back of which she had written, "Not a bit like me; makes me look ten years older. Please ask your people to rectify." We rectified to such an extent that the lady, instead of looking sedately fifty, recalled a sprightly young thing of twenty-five. She wrote back that all her friends agreed what a wonderfully good portrait we had published of her. Compared with our rejuvenation processes the finest face-lifting triumphs of Mayfair shrivelled into insignificance.

To become a director of the firm, ownership of 250 shares is a necessary qualification. As I was not possessed of any *Daily Mail* shares, Lord Northcliffe transferred me some of his. "My motto," he told me, "is neither to buy nor sell a single share in my business." A gift of shares was quite a different thing.

Meanwhile I had renewed my acquaintance with Professor Masaryk, first President of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, who, naturally enough, was interested in my Siberian impressions of his countrymen. We had had a fairly close association, for when he was living in Hampstead, "propaganding" for his Republic, the *Dispatch* was one of several newspapers to print his articles exposing the Pan-Germanic dream of World Empire. The rough notes which he dictated in answer to my questions I turned into article form. I found two sorts of men in him, the dry and learned professor, admirably suited to the atmosphere of a University; the keen connoisseur of humanity with a large and unsatisfied interest in all its activities. Masaryk was puzzled by many of the habits of the English lower classes; the scenes in Hyde Park immensely intrigued him.

Having occasion to see Winston Churchill at the War Office, I gave him a rough résumé of my impressions of the unfortunate Siberian business, telling him that had Koltchak's divisions been Scottish, instead of Russian, he would most certainly have reached Moscow. That notion made Winston smile. Had Koltchak won through to Moscow, would Mr. Churchill, like Napoleon over a hundred years earlier, have slept in the Kremlin, as the Parliamentary wits suggested?

Soon after my appointment as Editor I advertised for a "live" reporter, wondering with the War just over who would turn up. From Folkestone came a reply-paid telegram, "Please defer final decision until interview granted." The next day there arrived a young man booted and spurred, and in the uniform of a Captain in the Hampshire regiment, who told me that he had worked in America, but never before in Fleet Street. On the strength of his appearance and manner I engaged him. He has prospered ever since. His name was Peter Gates.

Through sheer luck, and with small appreciation of its scientific importance, we published the first news of the eclipse which was the final test of the Einstein theory. And a novice was responsible. He had come on to the paper for experience. I suggested that he should travel round the different museums, and visit such likely places for news as the Zoo and Greenwich Observatory. With beginner's luck, he called at Greenwich the same Friday as the result of the eclipse was received. They told him enough in comprehensible English to enable him to write a readable story, which the witty sub-editor, John Rayner, having regard to the eccentric behaviour of the light rays when passing through the denser atmosphere close to the edge of the sun, headed, "Light Caught Bending." This was about as much of the Einstein theory as we poor, benighted "mutts" could digest. Yet our heading seized the popular imagination, and like the Einstein theory itself, ran round the world.

We revelled in false glory. The credit we took to ourselves on account of this brilliant headline was quite undeserved. We were unconscious plagiarists. "Light Caught Bending" had been used by Charles Beattie, the distinguished *Daily Mail* night editor, to describe the Einstein theory when first announced. We worked in the same office and did not know it.

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The strange story of "The Silent Wife," followed by its complement, "The strange story of 'The Silent Husband'" gave Sunday paper readers an unusual form of diversion. In calm, unimpassioned detail that made the singular facts all the more astonishing, we unfolded in our columns a domestic drama that entirely broke away from the hackneyed paths of matrimonial discord. Under the same roof, year after year, lived man and wife who communicated with one another not by word of mouth, but by written notes. Otherwise a graveyard silence separated the two. The faithful portrayal of their emotions was entirely owing

to the skilful pen of the news-editor, John Austin,<sup>1</sup> who had originally suggested the idea as a good Sunday paper feature. Having a marked penchant for writing that demanded acute psychological understanding, and a vivid sense of the drama implicit in all human relations, Austin was well chosen for the task, and at Lord Northcliffe's instance was specially rewarded. So delighted was the Chief with the feature, that in order to whet the public appetite he had a column summary of each Sunday instalment printed in the preceding Saturday's issue of the *Daily Mail*.

In semi-humorous tones he asked over the telephone what I proposed next: "Supposing, Chief," I began cautiously, "there is 'A Silent Daughter . . . ?'" "In that case, young man," he interrupted grimly, "there will be 'A Silent Editor'." The possibility that "The Silent Family" might have no numerical limits filled him with terror.

In *The Times* one morning appeared a report of a speech by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, highly praising a spiritualist MS. written by a North Country clergyman, the Rev. G. Vale Owen. A clever reporter on the *Evening News*, G. H. Mumford, who dated back to the time when I was news-editor, saw the reference, and knowing the idea was unsuitable for his own paper passed it on to the *Dispatch*. In due course there was placed in my hands a bulky bundle of typewritten matter, which on cursory examination seemed a terrible hotch-potch. More by instinct than anything else, I took the view that here might be a sensational Sunday paper feature. To be quite candid, I was thinking not in terms of uplift, but in those of circulation. First I turned the manuscript over to Austin for his opinion, and then, before finally committing myself to a decision, handed it over to Nathan Newall, a man of studious character and religious turn of mind, whose one drawback was that he spoke in such low whispers that much of what he said was never heard.

The effect on Newall of reading the document was overpowering. Not only was he enamoured of its merits as a newspaper contribution, but he proclaimed Vale Owen's broodings to be Spiritualism's authentic Testament. For a staid journalist to be so worked up deeply impressed me. If this manuscript could have such an effect on a hard-boiled newspaper man, how much greater, I argued, must be the influence it exercised on the everyday public. Taking the voluminous script home with me, I browsed among its pages and convinced myself that Newall was right. Printed and properly

<sup>1</sup> The able journalist who was later to become Editor of *John Bull*.

advertised, the Rev. G. Vale Owen's writings would create great popular excitement.

Other people of much larger experience to whom I confided my intentions were far from sharing my enthusiasm. They could scarcely be blamed for distrusting what seemed on the surface a dangerous gamble. But, persuaded that it was good journalism to publish the document, I wrote in that sense to Lord Northcliffe, and submitted him suitable extracts. He was quickly on my side, being persuaded that the writings, with their comforting pictures of an after-life, would bring solace and happiness to many a bereaved parent. He was especially struck by the chapter in which the reverend gentleman depicted the survival after Death of pet animals, such as cats and dogs.

A huge sum was spent in advertising the feature which we called, "Beyond the Vale," and when publication day arrived it was safe to say that few people in Great Britain had not heard of the Rev. G. Vale Owen and his forthcoming Spirit revelations. The Chief promised me a Rolls Royce if we topped the million—in those days Sunday papers had not their present great sale—and all through the printing he kept ringing up Bowerman, who was then the publisher, to know how the figures were working out. Alas, we just failed to reach the million. On the Monday morning Lord Northcliffe came through on the telephone with the teasing remark, "Now that you have lost your Rolls Royce, what about a second-hand Ford?"

At the Chief's request I brought Vale Owen to *The Times* office. I shall never forget the nervous way in which the shy Warrington clergyman entered Lord Northcliffe's room. I had almost to push him in. Having placed the timid seer at his ease, Lord Northcliffe asked him to accept £1000. Vale Owen shook his head. For this part of his writings, he said, he could take no money. He had been well paid by the publicity given him, and by being able to carry out the sacred duty of placing his revelations before the world. Knowing full well Vale Owen's poverty, I was genuinely sorry to hear him refuse payment, but he was not to be dissuaded, and timidly backed out of the room, leaving Lord Northcliffe, who was unused to such unworldly figures, completely puzzled.

The humorous suggestion that I hurried Vale Owen away lest he change his mind, was the Chief's playful fancy, and his gentle way of poking fun at my reputed economical tendencies. So clear is my conscience regarding this simple, honest soul, that if

and when, as he prophesies, our spirits, no longer earth-bound, meet on the plane where care and pain are no more and happiness is at last our portion, I shall not fear to look him in the face.

In a monetary sense neither of us profited by the success of "Beyond the Vale." Apart from the Rolls Royce that never materialised, I had no direct stake in the circulation figures, nor at any time in my life was my remuneration based on sales. People who may have thought otherwise have been unwittingly deceived. The only one concerned to benefit, and rightly so, was Mumford, who on the Chief's instructions was sent a substantial cheque. He and Nathan Newall, who sub-edited the whole of the matter, were the heroes of the Vale Owen episode.

After Lord Northcliffe's death, Vale Owen insisted that he was in constant communication with his spirit, and that in the first message the Chief had sent over from the other world he had expressed regret that he had not got his cheque book with him. To me, at any rate, that did not sound like the real Northcliffe.

The cheque award system, to which I have briefly called attention, was largely practised by Lord Northcliffe to stimulate enterprise and good ideas. One of the best features in *The Times* is the column of abbreviated letters. For suggesting it G. M. Brumwell,<sup>1</sup> when night editor, was handsomely rewarded by the Chief, who was then controlling *The Times*.

<sup>1</sup> For many years Assistant Editor of *The Times*, but lately retired.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE CHIEF TEACHES ME GOLF

**Y**OU, who read these lines, please oblige me by supposing that sometime in 1921 you were the Editor of a popular Sunday paper, and in the vigilant pursuit of your duties were on the look-out for a first-class selling feature ; further, that beginning to despair of finding anything really good, you were recommended to serialise Lily Langtry's reminiscences. Would you consider that the right idea had presented itself ? Think carefully before answering, I beg of you. Visualise Lily Langtry in all the glamorous beauty which astonished the famed Edwardian era. Remember her romantic beginnings and the sensations she caused, both on the stage and in society. Bear in mind the piquant setting in which her days were cast. And, above all, let your imagination play round the unforgettable compliment, "The Jersey Lily," one more indication of the possibilities of the feature as a circulation-riser.

It happened to me to be faced with the very problem which you, the reader, are invited to solve, and the considerations which I have set out were just those to pass through my mind. The view I took was that Lily Langtry's reminiscences were the very thing for the *Dispatch*. Though I supported my opinion with a wealth of plausible argument, Lord Northcliffe took the opposite line.

The cleverest judge in England of what the public wanted was dead-set against the proposal. He asserted that Lily Langtry was definitely a back-number, not in the least likely to attract new circulation, or even retain old circulation. When he had fully made up his mind, it was folly to argue with Lord Northcliffe, and one had always to remember that he had an uncanny gift, amounting to genius, for appraising the likes and dislikes of the public. Yet, in this matter of Lily Langtry, I dare wager that he ran counter to the opinion of the rest of Fleet Street and was hopelessly wrong. Even the greatest man in the world cannot be a hundred per cent right in his judgments all the time.

I am certain that the frank reminiscences of Lily Langtry would have provided the best Sunday paper reading for many a

long day. They would have required to be frank, yet not foolishly indiscreet, and in the bargain as amusing as her conversation could often be. Though Mrs. Langtry was not generally known to have a humorous tongue, yet, caught in the right mood, she disposed of a merry fancy. On the occasion of a trip to America she amused everybody aboard with her answers to the Immigration questionnaire, which she filled up as follows :

Distinguishing body marks : A pair of big blue eyes.

Colour of hair : A matter of opinion.

Complexion : Troublesome.

Generally speaking, a journalist's experience is that the serialisation of reminiscences, especially those of theatrical favourites, is a terrific gamble. I have never known reminiscences so fresh and entertaining as Fay Compton's, written specially for the *Dispatch*. *Blasé* as I am they interested me ; yet the results woefully disappointed my estimate of increased circulation. On the other hand the memories of Gladys Cooper, which I did not think so intriguing, were voted a great success by the *Sunday Express*. The public is very curious, and no one can anticipate with certainty its likes and dislikes, though the remarkable frequency with which Lord Northcliffe succeeded in gauging popular taste largely explained why he triumphed, and others failed. I have suggested that over Lily Langtry he was wrong. Right or wrong, he was determined that her reminiscences should not appear in the *Dispatch*.

He reversed his own opinion in the case of Christabel Pankhurst's memories. The famous Suffragette leader, now a popular figure in America, was relating in the *Dispatch* the exciting incidents of her memorable life. To my astonishment, Lord Northcliffe insisted I had made a great mistake and should close the series without delay. Reluctantly I broke the distressing news to poor Christabel, who, being already in a "nervy" state, burst out crying. To see tears in the eyes of this iron-willed crusader tremendously affected me, especially as she was convinced that the decision to stop her articles was part of a hostile movement against which she had long been struggling. She was quite wrong to suspect any animus against her in Carmelite House, and this I was soon able to prove. Not only did Lord Northcliffe cancel the ban on the articles already ordered, but himself expressly arranged for several more to be taken. I think he came to the conclusion that he had been too hard both on his Editor and his contributor.

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On the ground that you could not capture the public fancy twice with the same idea, the Chief was utterly opposed to "sequels." Had he been alive he would probably have demurred to the purchase of Remarque's sequel to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and even the increased circulation which it brought the *Dispatch* would not have altered his attitude. Lord Rothermere would often quote his brother's dictum about "sequels", the good sense of which he thoroughly endorsed.

On his return from the Holy Land, which he had visited in the course of his world tour, Lord Northcliffe found the interminable dispute between the Palestine Jews and the Arabs in full swing. To learn the rights and wrongs of the controversy, which without really interesting him occupied much space in his papers, he invited Dr. Ch. Weizmann, the Zionist leader, and Shibly Effendi Jamal, the Arab leader, to meet him at his house in Carlton Gardens, so that each in turn might expound his case. Leo Maxse, Editor of the *National Review*, and myself were others invited to be present. The respective points of view were eloquently argued, logically and concisely by the cool Weizmann; passionately, and not always connectedly, by the excitable Jamal. Lord Northcliffe, who withheld his own opinion, was greatly relieved when the political *séance* was all over, and by his manner gave the impression of having had a weight lifted off his chest.

Taking a leaf out of Lord Rothermere's book, the Chief began decorating his house in Carlton Gardens with pictures, the best of which were a fine Canaletto and four typical masquerade scenes by Pietro Longhi, which originally had been in the possession of Alfred de Rothschild. But he lacked his brother's love of pictures, and left me with the feeling that he regarded money spent on art as unnecessary extravagance. While I was examining the pictures at Carlton Gardens, Lady Northcliffe expressed the mild hope that somebody would persuade Lord Northcliffe to complete the decoration scheme with the purchase of one or two additional tapestries. At a convenient moment I tactfully brought up the subject, and was heavily snubbed for my pains. "Young man," retorted the Chief severely, "any money I have over will not go in tapestries, but in new machinery to help to print the *Daily Mail* properly."

When he felt particularly well, and was not worried by what he took to be deficiencies in his papers, Lord Northcliffe was tempted to talk of his early days. I remember a delightful afternoon at

Carlton Gardens, when having shown me the secret room opened by means of a concealed panel, which, by the way, he had some trouble in finding himself, he began a conversation on the Jews, who at all periods of his life had interested him. As a boy living at Hampstead, he had gone visiting good-class Jews, such as the Lindos and the Halfords. He knew L. J. Greenberg, the advertising agent, who afterwards became Editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, and Lucien Wolf, the Foreign Editor of the *Daily Graphic*, who either gave or offered him a job when he was a mere youth.

Reverting to other topics, he spoke in the most laudable terms of his solicitor, Henry Preuss Arnholz, a school-chum, and one who throughout a lifetime of unbroken friendship had never once asked him for a favour. Next we discussed names, one of his pet subjects. Was the A in mine open or closed? He laughed when I remarked that "Falk" was a good name for any war. During the War, that fine journalist, O. I. Pulvermacher,<sup>1</sup> who was thirty-two years with the firm, casually asked him whether he should change his name. Lord Northcliffe replied, "Certainly not, they'll only say that your name used to be Pulvermacher." Personally I think Pulvermacher would have been foolish to have made any change at all.

The Chief did not approve of articles signed by people with commonplace names. What he liked was a name that people, once having come across, would always remember. Instances that came to his mind were, Rudyard Kipling, John Strange Winter, William Makepeace Thackeray, Nicholas Nickleby, Twells Brex. He was responsible for having invented in the *Daily Mail* the immortal name of "January Mortimer."

Mrs. Carlyle said of a letter she received from her husband that it was intended for his biographer. Such a remark could never truthfully be applied to anything that Lord Northcliffe indited. He wrote as he spoke, on the spur of the moment, without a single eye to posterity. Yet he would have relished a rounded biography of himself written while he was alive. In common with Lord Brougham and Lord Carson, he believed a full-dress biography to be possible in one's lifetime. Indeed, at the time of his death a monumental history of Alfred Harmsworth, first Baron Northcliffe, was in course of preparation. Various intimates regarded as suitable for the task were induced to try their hand at recording the remarkable story of his eventful life. In one book of journalistic memoirs the number of would-be Northcliffe biographers is given as four. That forty is nearer the mark,

<sup>1</sup> Now with the *Daily Telegraph*.

H. W. Wilson, most notable of the many biographers chosen by the Chief, would, I imagine, bear me out. Of one biographical effort Lord Northcliffe remarked with great bitterness, "Is that all they can say about me?"

Pointing to a spot near the centre of the garden at Elmwood, his Thanet seaside residence, he exclaimed in an assumed voice of piercing melancholy, "Shall I tell you what is buried there? Under that earth is buried my 'life.'" He was not exaggerating. Having been ordered to lose one of the forty "lives" that had not found favour in his master's sight, a faithful servitor had chosen interment for the manuscript as the most merciful form of extinction. The incident, rich in melodramatic detail, would have made a suitable chapter for an Emily Brontë novel.

When Lord Northcliffe bought *The Observer* from the executors of Mrs. Beer, he commissioned Charles Beattie, later Night Editor of the *Mail*, to write a full history of this remarkable paper. Six months in all was Beattie occupied with his material, and I have no doubt turned out something exceedingly entertaining. But the same fatality was to attend this manuscript as befell the different versions of Lord Northcliffe's "life." After being handed to the Chief it was neither seen nor heard of again, and, for all we know, may also have found a grave in the garden at Elmwood. A pity that it should be so, for Beattie's history of *The Observer* would have filled a regrettable blank in journalistic records. It would have given us some picture of the wonderful Mrs. Beer, who regularly dictated her own "leaders," including on a famous occasion one on "Cannibalism." They say of her leaders that they had all the shrewdness and commonsense of her sex, but would have been better for a little manly punch.

To finish off this note on *The Observer*, a cautious word or two in respect to finance may not be out of place. I always understood that Lord Northcliffe paid £4000 for the goodwill, and that when he sold the paper to Lord Astor, after having given it a new lease of life, the monetary consideration was £60,000—cheap, if those whispers in Fleet Street are true, that in boom times a profit of as much as £40,000 a year has been made by *The Observer*.

The year Lord Northcliffe rented a villa at Roquebrune in the South of France, I was one of a party that sat round the hearth at night, and helped to entertain him with reminiscences. One colleague, more loquacious than the rest, suddenly looked up to find a frozen expression in the Chief's eye. Alarmed, he exclaimed, "Am I boring you, Chief?"

"Not much," was the grim reply. "Go on!"

With great justification I can claim to be the world's worst golfer. With what malicious glee, then, did the rest of the company hail the news that I had been singled out to go round with Lord Northcliffe at Mont Agel. When I begged to be excused, pleading that I was only a beginner, the Chief with sardonic colloquialism replied: "I'll larn you, young man." Before leaving on their own amusements, my colleagues expressed the fond hope that I would "get it in the neck." As Rochefoucauld was wont to say, "In the misfortunes of our friends we can often find a melancholy satisfaction."

My play was by no means improved by Lord Northcliffe's sarcastic allusions to my idiotic stance, and to the ridiculous way in which I gripped my iron. Patiently I bore his taunts until we came to a part of the course where, on a clear day, the country may be seen for miles and miles around. As I took up my driver, the Chief with contemptuous impatience shouted, "For God's sake, man, do something!" That gave me inspiration. With a silent prayer to the Omnipotent Being who has ever kept me in His care, I raised my arm, to feel, like Samson of old, new strength stealing into my wrists, and an exultant sense of guidance directing my stroke. The ball rose like some wild, feathered creature of the air, and in the thin, startled haze soared triumphantly until lost forever. "Where do you think your ball has gone," asked Lord Northcliffe derisively, yet not unimpressed. "Into Italy, Chief," was my modest reply, "and I have no *visa*." Frenchmen, standing to watch the little, awkward Englishman drive, still speak with awe of the Homeric swipe. How inadequate was Lord Northcliffe's comment, "Of all the golf-players, Falk, I've ever met, you're the rummiest!"

During his stay at Pau, which was in the winter of 1921-22, Lord Northcliffe converted an enormous sitting-room into a tangle of telephone and bell wires, through which, in order to attend to his instructions, I picked my way as best I could. Sooner or later I knew I should put my foot into it. Struggling to be free when at last I was caught in the wires, I pulled the tablecloth off, upsetting the ink-pot all over the expensive new carpet. As they say in Hampstead, "there was a terrible 'schlem-mozzle.'" Instead of upbraiding me, as I fully expected, Lord Northcliffe sent for the hotel people. He was grieved to think, he said, that I, his friend, should have nearly broken my leg. The sooner the mess was wiped up, the quicker he would be able to pacify me and resume his work. For the next hour the hotel servants were busy with scrubbing brushes and carpet-soap.

When they had gone, Lord Northcliffe, a twinkle in his eye, turned to me and said : " I knew you would upset the ink, but I didn't think so soon ! "

At Pau, the apartment next to the Chief was occupied by W. L. Warden, then Editor of the *Continental Daily Mail*. Whether by coincidence or design, and I gravely suspected the latter, whenever Lord Northcliffe heard splashes in the adjoining bathroom, he sent for Warden, who, temporarily enveloped in a dressing-gown, obeyed the behest without the slightest sign of embarrassment. That was the way to get on with the Chief.

With Tom Clarke<sup>1</sup> as companion I took a night motor-trip into the beautiful surrounding country. Suddenly our wheels became boggled. In the pitch-black darkness, on getting out to investigate, I unfortunately stumbled into a ditch. When eventually I scrambled forth, I was soaked to the skin. As fast as my drenched legs would carry me, I made for a neighbouring farm-house whose friendly lights promised a welcome and relief. Here, with Tom Clarke a sympathetic but amused onlooker, I removed my clothes with something like the unrevealing dexterity of women bathers undressing on the sands, and, screened by ample folds of newspaper, waited while my garments were dried and afterwards pressed by old-fashioned heavy irons into a little of their original condition. Need I say that, as I sat before the great fire, the good wives of the farm-house were too motherly to be concerned over my surprising *négligé* ? I had hopes that the episode, which was capable of considerable humorous distortion, would escape Lord Northcliffe's ear. Alas, for my hopes ! What is one chauffeur's secret is soon another's. Gathering luscious detail as it spread, the story at length reached Lord Northcliffe. For days I was mercilessly quizzed, a favourite opening remark to the Chief's conversation being, " Did you hear what happened to Falk's trousers at Pau ? "

A poetess living abroad wrote that, in due course, a batch of her latest poems would reach us. Would we see that they were brought immediately under the notice of Lord Northcliffe ? He instructed me to telegraph the following reply, " Please delay poems until receipt of letter which follows."—" But what am I

<sup>1</sup> For some years Editor of the *Daily News*.

to write the lady, Chief?" I asked in utter bewilderment. "That's your affair, young man," was the reply. "What do I pay you an enormous salary for?"

When the late Lord Leverhulme, disliking a portrait that Augustus John had painted of him, cut off the head and put it into his safe, I asked Lord Northcliffe with which of the two men he sympathised. "Entirely with Lord Leverhulme," was his answer. "John's business should have been to please the old man."

The Chief professed to dislike seeing too many advertisements in his newspapers. There was a week when I had to carry 55½ columns of advertising matter in a sixteen-page paper. Lord Northcliffe rang up complainingly, "Don't you know what to do when you have too many advertisements?" I awaited his advice. He went on: "when you've too many advertisements, hide them, silly fellow, hide them." Alas! to hide 55½ columns in a paper of that size called for more ingenuity than I could at any time muster.

As the Khaki Coalition lumbered slowly but surely to its doom, the project of a Centre Party, around which Lloyd George loyalists from all sections might rally, was openly discussed. Lord Birkenhead, the Lord Chancellor, agreed in the national interest to write us a series of articles, the feature of which was a sensational attack on "The Invertebrate Coalition." Actually the articles were secured by Harry Ainsworth, the very able news-editor (afterwards Editor of *John Bull* and now, as is well known, Editor of *The People*), who in the negotiations displayed great tact and journalistic skill. When the question of paying for the articles cropped up, Lord Birkenhead waived his right to compensation, thinking it wrong in his position to be thought an ordinary paid newspaper contributor. But during the run of the articles he asked that criticism of himself in the Northcliffe papers should be suspended, otherwise he might be made to look ridiculous. As Lord Birkenhead's plea could not be ignored, I wrote to the Chief, and in reply got a withering "turn-down." Nevertheless Lord Birkenhead finished the articles, which in the nation-wide stir they caused more than served his purpose.

In the summer months of 1922, when Lord Northcliffe was lying on his last bed of sickness, I would often find myself on



the terrace of the Royal Automobile Club, gazing anxiously in the direction of his house, where the little roof pavilion built to give him more air was the only tangible sign that he still lived. The chimneys of his own home being in the way, it had been necessary to erect the chalet on the slates of the adjoining house which belonged to the Duke of Devonshire, who had telephoned from Chatsworth the necessary permission. I thought it strange that my old Chief should be dying on another man's roof, not the least unexpected of the happenings in his astonishing history. Of the funeral at Finchley I remember most seeing St John Harmsworth wheeled to the edge of the grave, to take a last look at the remains of the great brother who had helped to make the family name of world-wide celebrity, and whom, nearly eleven years later, he was to join in the same last sleep.

For long after the Chief's death I was conscious of a certain emptiness in my life. Lord Northcliffe had meant much to me. To him I owed what effective advancement I had made in journalism; I was in his debt for many kindnesses, not normally embraced in business relations. How often had we laughed together!

The sound of Lord Northcliffe's name, I am persuaded, will not grow fainter with the years. If he were to be remembered solely for his newspaper achievements, it might be that men would tire of his memory. But he was so much more than a great newspaper man; he was a great personality, a massive figure of anecdote, not unlike the rude, downright robust Johnson, who lives in a hundred immortal utterances. Whenever Fleet Street men of my generation meet, they will have typical stories and characteristic sayings of Lord Northcliffe to exchange. These, falling from their lips, will be caught by a curious, younger race of journalists to whom he is a shadowy figure. In that way, if in no other, the legend which carries his name on will not fade, nor seem fantastic and unsubstantial; neither will the human picture it preserves be much different from the likeable and kindly outlines in which my own grateful imagination clothes his remembered form. From decade to decade some echo of the noise he made in the world will be relayed, to remind us of his thunders. Alas! there was a magic in the man, subtle essences of personality, which no time-wind can bear along.

None of my references to Lord Northcliffe has any deliberate critical quality. I have not sought to assess his contribution to journalism, to politics or to public affairs; neither have I wished

to sit in judgment either on his career or his critics. This would be to exceed my present modest purpose. But it is permissible to repeat, what posterity is not likely to challenge, that he saved *The Times*, and, helped by his brother, Lord Rothermere, revolutionised modern journalism, improved working conditions in Fleet Street, and made newspaper life a thrilling adventure. In any fair view, as in the expressive words of Lord Beaverbrook, he remains "the greatest figure who ever strode down Fleet Street."

I react to kindness. Just as he would say to his secretaries, "you are giving up your life to me," so Lord Northcliffe would say to me, "You are giving the best years of your life to my business; you must be suitably rewarded." In the presence of such a patriarchal attitude how could one remain unmoved? I have never taken the view that ingratitude is the sign manual of a superior soul, nor that to bite the hand that feeds you is a mark of laudable independence, though I can readily imagine situations in which turning the other cheek can be more vice than virtue. Possibly I was more fortunate in my dealings with Lord Northcliffe than some who found him dangerous, and hinted that the Northcliffian arena savoured of the jungle. Early on I learnt that while success might be the best recommendation to his good graces, it was not all-sufficing. Something more was required—a sympathetic understanding of his complex and often contradictory psychology, together with the temper to take his praise and blame, his raillery and facetiousness, with an equally dispassionate calm. That with a mild kind of drollery I responded to his infinite and exacting moods, assisted to sweeten our relations. The breath of humour that kept our contacts lively, likewise freshened them. On the principle inherited from remote ancestors that a soft answer turneth away wrath, I rarely argued with him. When he was angry I bided my time. This, also, the much shrewder Moberly Bell discovered to be wise. There was an appropriate moment when Lord Northcliffe could be reasoned with, for with him, as with a not dissimilar genius, Lloyd George, you were well advised to take a fence obliquely.

Lord Northcliffe had a large and not unworthy ambition transcending his empire of the Press, which, as part of his considerable frustration, was never to be fulfilled. He saw other journalists rise to great heights, while he was deprived of what he considered the rightful crown of his glory—to be one of Britain's representatives at the Peace Conference. He saw Clemenceau, the journalist, ruling France with a rod of iron; he saw Harding, taken from a local daily published in Marion, Ohio, seated in

supreme power at Washington, and he saw Colonel George Harvey—"My dear George"—proprietor of a magazine with a limited sale, picked out as America's envoy to the Court of St. James's. To an impressionable man could the spectacle be other than mortifying?

To the end Lloyd George alternately fascinated and repelled him. In respect to the great War Prime Minister, Lord Northcliffe's feelings were akin to those of Madame de Staël in respect to Benjamin Constant: she could neither live with him nor without him. I have always doubted whether Lloyd George would have turned so bitterly on Lord Northcliffe, had he not been goaded on by other politicians still smarting under the *Daily Mail* attacks. Left to himself, the then Prime Minister might have been much more merciful in his references. On his part, how much wiser had Lord Northcliffe been to have remained true to his old philosophy, "The dog barks, but the camel marches on!"

People who complained that you could not work with Northcliffe were, in reality, confessing that he was too independent to be caged or ride tandem. The situation, as it appeared to many of the politicians, was not ineptly sketched by the famous Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, who, referring to someone's vaunt that he had got Lord Northcliffe, remarked: "I do not know if this was an idle boast or not, but in any case, I do not think I should be unduly depressed by that risk, because though he may have got Lord Northcliffe to-day, there is no certainty that he will have got him to-morrow."

There remains the riddle of Lord Northcliffe's success. Genius, luck, industry, stature matched to opportunity—all might explain his tremendous achievement, yet they would leave out a factor I have always considered as important as any. *He was never satisfied.* As fast as he reached one level of success he ached for another. To-day's results were only a foretaste of to-morrow's. His attitude towards men was much the same as his attitude towards achievement. You began your career with him every day. It was not what you had done that interested him, but what you were going to do. He considered that he had a right to demand from his associates an improving mind, because he applied the same severe test to himself. Take his hours—5 a.m. till 10 p.m.—all concentrated on his newspapers. Mark with what endless patience he taught himself to become a first-class after-dinner

speaker ! Remember the way he atoned for an indifferent education by wide reading, and an ever-growing knowledge of men and their motives !

The following allusions and anecdotes may help to give the reader a better idea of his complex character :—

Lord Northcliffe had a great liking for Queen Alexandra, which in no small measure was reciprocated. While showing me a letter from Marlborough House, in which Her Majesty expressed her deep regret at not finding him present at a social function where she had hoped to see him, he remarked, a touch of acid in his voice : “ yet people who dislike me go about saying that I am hated at Court.”

At 6 a.m., having already been up about an hour, he telephoned one of his publishers who had been working through the night.

“ Where are you ? ” he asked peevishly. “ I have been looking for you for ever so long.”

“ I’m in bed, Chief,” was the perfectly truthful reply.

“ In bed ? Just where I would expect you to be ! ” was the disconcerting retort.

A young Editor was asked if he were an early riser. “ A very early riser,” was the jaunty answer. “ Come to breakfast then at 6 a.m.,” was Lord Northcliffe’s answer.

Telephoning the *Daily Mail* at an unusual hour in the morning, he was, by mistake, put through to the big room where a raw copy-boy answered him. “ Who’s that ? ” queried the youngster in a shrill, treble voice.

“ Lord Northcliffe, you fool,” was the impatient reply.

“ One moment, O Lord ! ” shrieked the terrified boy, dropping the receiver and running for assistance.

A smart boy, leaping down the front stairs, cannoned into Lord Northcliffe. “ Look here, my boy,” said the annoyed proprietor, “ you are far too dangerous to be about my building. Go and tell the cashier to give you a week’s money and don’t let me see you again.”

“ But——” protested the boy.

"No 'buts,' just go along to the cashier and tell him that Lord Northcliffe says you're to have a week's money."

"Where are you from?" inquired the cashier when the boy reached him.

"Mather and Crowther!" (the well-known advertising agents) was the reply.

The Editor of one of his comic journals published a page of thin policemen. "Don't you know," Lord Northcliffe told him over the telephone, "that thin policemen are not funny? Get back to fat policemen, at once."

A serial story writer who had done good work was promised a handsome mark of esteem. The next day a bulky package arrived at his house. On being opened it was found to consist of copies of *Answers* containing the full instalment of the celebrated serial, "Convict 99"—*on loan*.

When the *Daily Mirror* new battery of machines was being installed, a specially hired commissionaire was put on the door to see that no unauthorised person crowded in. Lord Northcliffe strolled up, and on being challenged gave his name. "So you're Lord Northcliffe!" was the sarcastic reply. "Well, you're the seventh bloke that's come that game. Out you go!"

An artist of distinction was commissioned to draw an illustrated poster. "The border needs strengthening," commented the Chief.

"To touch the border would be to spoil the effect of the design," replied the artist, a man of mature years.

"Young man," retorted the Chief, "I'm not arguing with you; I'm telling you!"

A well-known politician complained of the constant abuse he was receiving. "It will be time enough for you to complain," was Lord Northcliffe's rejoinder, "when we don't mention you at all."

Jack Dempsey, entertained by the Chief at Carlton Gardens, said: "I cannot make a speech and I cannot sing, but I'll fight anybody in the room."

During the War, Lord Northcliffe, who had a great liking for Isaac Marcossan, the American journalist famous for his celebrity interviews, wanted to tease him. So he told me to address an envelope to him with the initial I on a line by itself, thus :

I  
Marcossan, Esq.,  
Savoy Hotel,  
W.

A journalist, having heard that Lord Northcliffe was about to sack him, introduced his boy with the cunning remark, "That's the good, kind gentleman who buys you all those nice clothes."

Happening to have his camera ready fixed, a *Dispatch* photographer snapped a man in the act of suicide in Piccadilly Circus. I printed the snapshot. "How did you get it, Falk?" asked Lord Northcliffe over the telephone. "By arrangement, Chief," was my answer.

For years news-editor of the *Daily Mail* before becoming Editor, W. G. Fish had a regular morning telephone call from the Chief. Sometimes contact was established by the mischievously worded, but apparently artless, question: "anything fresh, Fish?"

Nothing irritated Lord Northcliffe more than inability on the part of any member of his staff to hear him. To test your powers he had an ingenious plan. Himself reclining in a long arm-chair in his room at *The Times*, he would motion you to be seated at the far end. Then, holding his hands over his mouth like a cup, he would whisper an instruction. If you failed to catch what he said, quick came the inevitable explosion, "Deaf, as I suspected. No wonder things go wrong. Go and see —, of Harley Street. Tell him I sent you, and for heaven's sake! get him to examine your ears."

Lord Northcliffe once told me that there were men on newspapers in Fleet Street who had heard nothing for ten years.

In the course of a walk along the Embankment, a junior member of the staff, since risen to eminence, paused by the Savoy Hotel to remark to Lord Northcliffe, "That's where I often slept when I was a young man."

"You extravagant fellow!" was the comment of the Chief, "Fancy you spending all your money at the Savoy!"

"I am not referring to the Savoy," corrected the other, "I am referring to the Embankment seats opposite!"

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In his Will that gave rise to such protracted litigation, the director of every company, of which he was himself a director at the time of his death, was left £1000. On the other hand there was a clause stipulating that no director was eligible for three months' money, such as was left to employees of three years' standing, or over. As Lord Northcliffe had ceased to be a director of Associated Newspapers, it was held that I was not entitled to the £1000, and being a director of one of his companies, I could not claim three months' money. Thus I was hit both ways. However, a small personal legacy made me feel that I had not altogether been omitted from a Will that had something for everybody.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### LORD ROTHERMERE'S VISION

LORD NORTHCLIFFE being no more, the fate of his newspaper properties had to be determined without undue delay. I could never imagine myself in competition with Lord Rothermere, and it was on the entirely mistaken assumption that he did not care to saddle himself with further journalistic responsibilities, that, having been promised substantial money support, I made a tentative offer for the Chief's *Daily Mail* shares. The fact is mentioned not vaingloriously, but as having a larger interest than attaches to any other incident in my chequered career.

Having previously bought a number of *Daily Mail* deferred shares at £2 each, I imagined that a bid of £3 10s. for Lord Northcliffe's shares would be somewhere near top price. Lord Rothermere's offer of £4 per share, naturally, ruled mine out, and I faded away, my last hope of being a prosperous newspaper proprietor gone, and in my heart only the stern determination to have done with ambitious thoughts that brought me nothing but rebuffs. Henceforth I was resolved to keep my eyes sternly veiled from the mountain tops, or, to be more precise, to make sure that my feet were firmly glued to the earth.

The return of Lord Rothermere to the *Daily Mail* scene meant more than the maintenance of the Harmsworth name and connection. It was a guarantee that the control would be in the hands of one to whom a large measure of the credit for the inception and success of the *Daily Mail* belonged—a point often overlooked by people, who in their haste to be fair to Lord Northcliffe, forget to be equally fair to his brother.

Under the new ægis, in a quieter, more businesslike atmosphere, quickly adjusted to a different, not so exacting point of view, my Editorship of the *Dispatch* was fated to run another nine years. The relationship between Lord Rothermere and myself was pleasant and enduring, without being as free and intimate as my association with his brother. In a number of aspects the new relationship, though less flattering either to my vanity or to the appeal of my personality, possessed distinct advantages over the



old. Life grew more composed, not so liable to office earthquakes, or extreme courses. A more urbane mind presided over the destinies of the business, guiding it with a loose rein, though not less strongly held ; one's sense of material comfort expanded. I began to know how much more agreeable existence could be, if one were not harassed by the telephone bell ringing at all hours of the day and night.

Actually as an editor I was associated with Lord Rothermere twice as long as with Lord Northcliffe. I had many opportunities of contrasting their methods and outlook, and these taught me how distinct in character and personality were these dominant men. If they had many points of resemblance, as one would expect of brothers, they diverged in a hundred noticeable ways.

For one thing, Lord Rothermere understood the art of living ; knew how to make the best of the days God had given him ; had the gift of combining work and pleasure in a reasonably proportioned whole. Lord Northcliffe for all his genius, never learned to be a connoisseur of life. The sense of enjoyment which comes from a keen appreciation of the simple, good things of existence was always denied him. Outside the narrow channel of his newspapers, rarely did he find peace or contentment of mind. Every hour snatched from work was, he felt, wasted. Lord Rothermere, to my own knowledge, strove hard to persuade his brother to share other interests—to become, like himself, a lover of works of art, bijouterie, old silver ; to patronise the theatre and a little dancing, all habits which, if properly cultivated, would have improved Lord Northcliffe's health.

The suggestion that he should learn to dance made Lord Northcliffe smile. The " Napoleon of the Press " had no heart for frivolity of this description ; yet he should have remembered that the Napoleon who reigned over France, with little time and less opportunity for unbending, taught himself to waltz in order to be companionable to Marie Louise.

During the War, in the midst of my labours with the Chief at St. James's Place, Lord Rothermere would often arrive for a business talk, and after these visits Lord Northcliffe would invariably feel tempted to discuss him. A favourite allusion was to " My brother's business and financial sagacity "—his exact words—to which he hastened to pay high tribute. More than once he ruefully admitted that Lord Rothermere belonged to a healthier, more athletic-minded type, and with unmistakable envy referred to his constant habit of playing leap-frog with his fine boys, two of whom, sad to say, were killed in the War.

The essential difference between the two men was strikingly illustrated by the refusal of one to believe that there was a time for work and a time for play, and the refusal of the other to make himself a slave to his papers, or to any other of his business interests.

With his better business brain and calmer temperament, Lord Rothermere could delegate responsibility, and escape the oppression of detail. Not so Lord Northcliffe. In any newspaper which he did not control down to the smallest details he was not in the least interested. The chemistry of Lord Rothermere's mind gave rise to different subtleties, and produced different aptitudes. Hard economic facts which Lord Northcliffe found unappetising, he collated with ease, and interpreted with great accuracy. The way in which during the ten preceding years he prophesied the economic crisis was but one of many proofs of his discernment. Much better read, and canvassing a wider range of interests than his brother, he realised far sooner than most people the drift of the nation towards industrial and financial shoals. It was from him that Lord Northcliffe took the much-needed Anti-Waste crusade. A prominent politician not so long ago described Lord Rothermere as the finest judge of industrial conditions in the country. How he obtained his facts was no secret. He travelled up and down the country, not by train but by motor-car, seeing with his own keen eyes what was happening. Wherever he went he was alarmingly impressed by the growing ravages of industrial depression,—closed mines, mills and factories, stagnant shipyards, and grey villages that wore the mournful visage of long-standing unemployment.

When he proceeded to warn the public that we were living on the edge of a volcano, he was reproached by smooth-tongued politicians with being a gloomy pessimist. Even members of his own staff hesitated to believe that the state of the country could be so serious. Not until the crisis that turned us off gold was upon us was his campaign of enlightenment vindicated.

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Lord Rothermere astonished a well-known shipowner by rattling off, quite impromptu, the population of Northumberland. Too polite to challenge the information, the shipowner went home, called for a book of reference, and to his amazement found that Lord Rothermere was right to a hundred or two. But then in him a flair for statistics has long been united to a prodigious memory. His mind would carefully store up casual remarks of

interesting people, to be brought out, years later, with devastating effect.

Lord Rothermere's friends speak admiringly of his ability to read a newspaper, and at the same time closely follow a conversation involving intricate finance. Bertram Lima, for years his chief lieutenant, used to say that in Lord Rothermere two separate and distinct minds simultaneously functioned, one carrying on an ordinary conversation, the other deftly sifting information.

By keeping to his room on the plea of illness, and thus not being at home to troublesome callers, Lord Rothermere has generally managed to ensure himself the peace and quietness necessary for solving difficult problems and completing big financial schemes. For this expedient he could have found ample support in history. On an occasion of acute perplexity, Disraeli remarked to his wife, "This is the moment to imitate Talleyrand, who when he could not see very clearly what ought to be done, took to his bed."

Whereas Lord Northcliffe could never be induced to look systematically after his health, and had a weakness for telling doctors who annoyed him that the profession was packed with fools, Lord Rothermere has always taken special care to keep well—by travel, by constant change of scenery, and by following the advice of two able physicians regularly in attendance on him. In this respect he reminded me of Alfred de Rothschild, who, when I knew him, paid a West End physician a high retainer to give him a daily report on his health.

I should imagine that Lord Rothermere has spent a quarter of his life travelling in trains and on Atlantic liners. Thanks to his ability to sleep like a top, he has experienced none of the discomforts to which many people who travel are liable. Nothing is more surprising than the nonchalance with which he arranges journeys extending to thousands of miles at twenty-four hours' notice.

Whilst having his temperature taken and generally being overhauled, Lord Rothermere has been known to answer the questions of his doctors, and at the same time carry on a vigorous conversation with four or five other people in the room. To all but the initiated, it would seem a chaos of questions and answers.

Though he has not spoken much in public, he has often impressed a small, select audience with his eloquence, and with what Lord Beaverbrook has described as his "Johnsonian manner." Like most men of his calibre, in order to lay the necessary emphasis on his remarks he has been inclined to exaggerate, to make

sweeping statements in excess of the facts, well aware at the time that he was rubbing in his colours too deeply. The people most suitably equipped to deserve his confidence have been those best able to interpret his views and instructions correctly, that is to say, not overawed into taking him too literally. On coming away from a business meeting with him, one of his closest colleagues said to me, warmly and sincerely, "Falk, whenever I am with Lord Rothermere, I remember that I am an ordinary Fleet Street fellow, and he a great man of affairs."

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While I was never able to recommend my particular brand of humour to Lord Rothermere's discriminating palate, and was therefore not often in his company, on such occasions as I did see him I could appreciate his lively fancies, which, if a little more subtle, seemed to me to have much of the boyish and teasing quality of Lord Northcliffe's banter. In default of first-hand experience, I could enjoy the recollections of others privileged to enjoy his society.

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One day Lord Rothermere appeared at the *Daily Mirror* office, to find the ordinary commissionaire temporarily away. A new boy on duty at the door would not let him pass; he must sign the usual form, and send it up. In his neat, beautiful handwriting he wrote, "Lord Rothermere would like to speak to his secretary!"

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When a financier known for his improvidence went wrong Lord Rothermere's comment was: "he should have surrounded himself with Scotsmen!"

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Inquiring why alterations he had ordered in the office of the *Glasgow Record*, which he then owned, were not ready, he was told that there had been a carpenters' strike. The implied suggestion being that he might do worse than lend a hand himself, he remarked, "Well, I have often urged the Government to use the axe, but I never expected to be asked by my own staff to use the hammer."

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Arriving in the South of France an hour earlier than his chauffeur expected him, Lord Rothermere, to amuse himself, donned an old suit of clothes, and was driven in a hired, broken-down motor-car to his brother Alfred's villa. His woes gone

appearance caused Lady Northcliffe to exclaim, "Harold, whatever's the matter?" "Oh," was the melancholy reply, "things are not so good. I have to be economical now." "I *am* sorry," added his sister-in-law sympathetically. But the sudden change of expression in Lord Rothermere's face put an end to further commiseration.

The ease with which Lord Rothermere can change from a heavy, financial discussion to light and amusing topics is one of his great charms. Another is his agreeable distrust of rigid, scientific orthodoxy. For instance, he would not dismiss as valueless the theory that one should sleep with one's head to the North, thereby benefiting by the earth's magnetic currents. With his bed turned in the prescribed direction, he experimented for himself both at Sunningdale and at Dornoch. It was at his suggestion that I wrote an article on this subject in the *Daily Mail*. People who scoffed were reminded by Lord Rothermere that, not long ago, there were wiseacres who laughed heartily at the idea of wireless telegraphy and broadcasting through the ether.

To an affection for the teachings of tradition, he has allied a belief in the virtues of honey, most nutritious of nature's sweetening products, and an aid to longevity.

As illustrating the elasticity of his mind, I may say that I have known Lord Rothermere debate before a dazed journalistic gathering the future of the dollar, the course of War debts, the different stages in the Hitler movement, and the folly of premature Westernised constitutions for Eastern countries; then switch off to discuss the suitability of oyster-beds at Dornoch. The day following, every procurable published work on the cultivation of oysters was to be found on his desk. Characteristically he wanted to study the facts for himself.

Nothing does greater credit to Lord Rothermere's character as an employer than his desire to be scrupulously fair. It is easy for the head of a great business to be misled. Intrigue and bias cannot always be excluded from business life. Where fuller information has convinced Lord Rothermere that he has made a mistake he has, I am told, never hesitated to avow it, and make prompt amends. In one case reparation was sweetened by a handsome personal gift. The aggrieved party, much to his surprise, was told to write himself out a transfer for a hundred shares. It is pleasant to think of a big man being big enough to admit that, like everybody else, he can be betrayed into error.

Despite his great wealth Lord Rothermere has often found

himself without any loose cash, and the following story, which I am assured is quite true, bears amusingly on the point. In one of his newspaper deals with Lord Camrose, there remained a small difference of £25,000 to settle. It was decided to toss up. Neither of the millionaires could find a coin. After a vigorous search of his pockets, Lord Camrose unearthed a penny from the lining of his waistcoat. Up in the air it went. "Tails," said Lord Rothermere. "It's heads," cried Lord Camrose. "Come and look." "No, I'll take your word for it," said Lord Rothermere, declining to budge from his chair.

"And the penny—what shall we do with that?"

"Oh, that's yours, Camrose. After to-day's experience you had better keep a tight hold of it."

That Lord Rothermere frequently ran short of ready money was due to his habit of using the notes he drew in the morning as largesse. By 4 p.m. they would all have been distributed to a multitude of dependents with real, or imaginary, claims upon him. An attendant had not been given a tip for a month; there must be a note for him. Another menial, who looked in, had to be similarly rewarded, and so on until his pockets were empty.

His public generosity, notably the purchase of the site of Bethlem Hospital, and much of the site of the Foundling Hospital, is too familiar to be stressed here; but what the outside world does not know is that, for years, like the late Lord Rothschild, he employed a discreet almoner to make secret benefactions to the deserving poor.

When out walking with him, members of the staff would be required to succour with large pieces of silver beggars met on the way, which usually lay along the Embankment. At such times he was afforded a practical demonstration of the falsity of the slanderous report that the Scotsmen on his staff hated to part.

In the summer months, while taking the air in Hyde Park, he would make the humble chair-men happy with unbelievable gratuities. His companions, after similar disbursements, would be proclaimed for future identification as some of the richest men in London—a compliment with which the shy journalists would fain have dispensed. While companioned by W. A. McWhirter, for long his *Sunday Pictorial* Editor, Lord Rothermere was approached by a forlorn stranger, to whose pitiful plea for assistance he replied with a five-note note. The astonished suppliant looked dubiously at the precious piece of paper, con-

fessed he had never before in his life seen the like, and on being told it was a Bank of England "fiver", sorrowfully remarked that if it were found on him he would be "pinched." McWhirter changed the note into more familiar Bradburys. Whereupon breathing blessings on the unknown Haroun al Raschid, the man took his leave, a new light of hope in his eyes.

When Lord Rothermere was living in Duchess Place, Portland Place, two ladies came up the street singing hymns for pence. Up went Lord Rothermere's windows, and as he threw them down half-crowns by way of encouragement he lustily joined in the singing himself—a delectable sight for men and gods!

Another time visitors to his home found him chasing a small boy round the gardens, the exact cause of provocation being a well-aimed "conker." Business acquaintances have always had to be prepared to see him break off the conversation at a most critical moment, in order to join in the tempting games of small children. Remember in this connection Lord Northcliffe's wistful reference to his brother playing leap-frog!

Alike with Lord Northcliffe, to whom in the lighter side of his nature he approximated, Lord Rothermere was amused by gentle leg-pulling, his victims usually being favourite, well-to-do members of his staff, of grave and reverend mien. The fun he took was for him to make an elaborate calculation of their supposed wealth, proving that each was a semi-millionaire. Such success, he would warmly argue, cried out to be commemorated. What more appropriate than a banquet with the choicest wines and cigars? Individual reactions to the teasing drollery depended upon the particular sense of humour of the different persons concerned, and upon the measure of equanimity with which the prospective liability was faced. Having regard to the fact that all of them owed a large part of their fortune to Lord Rothermere's shrewd advice, it would have shown poor spirit on their part to have resented the infinitesimal cost of completing the joke.

It is reasonable to doubt whether wealth, on anything like the scale earned in the period of my London journalism, will ever again be amassed by individual, working journalists. As regards rich monetary rewards, admittedly my own newspaper generation was to be envied. Early associates of Lord Northcliffe and Lord Rothermere retired not only rich men, but recipients of pensions running into four figures. The Chief constantly referred to the enormous sums paid to lucky people in his employ, but

their earnings, at the best, fell short of the emoluments reaped under Lord Rothermere's banner. As showing what big ideas on the subject of money prevailed, I remember a former colleague, whose faith in the value of *Daily Mail* shares had been handsomely rewarded, saying that no one could be comfortable on less than a million pounds. It was hard to believe that this naïve remark was seriously meant.

The subject of other people's money is always an interesting topic, especially to those who have none themselves. During the War, and at other momentous stages in our history, lively discussion centred round the amount of compensation to be paid big business officials called upon to join the Government service. I doubt whether the compensation they were paid was ever on the generous scale practised by the *Daily Mail*, when controlled either by Lord Northcliffe or Lord Rothermere. Without turning a hair, this firm, in keeping with its splendid traditions, has paid out sums which, I for one believe, constitute a record in newspaper munificence. Even to think of some of the bigger amounts is enough to make one's mouth water.

When Lord Rothermere took over the *Daily Mail* interests of his brother, he formed the *Daily Mail* Holding Trust, an original method of financing the purchase which was brilliantly successful. A feature of the Trust was an issue of £1 shares, 2s. paid, whose value naturally rose with the prosperity of the *Daily Mail* business. With great generosity Lord Rothermere distributed a large number of the shares among members of his staffs, the fortunate holders finding out, in due course, that what they had paid 2s. for was worth forty times as much. By some mischance, as in Lord Northcliffe's will, I was prevented from sharing in this windfall. When, perhaps rather late in the day, I ventured to inquire from one of the higher-ups why I had been left out of the allotment, all the satisfaction I got was the answer that the shares had gone to the people who needed them most !

In several cases the fortunes earned for friends of mine by Lord Rothermere's acute brain were subsequently reduced by unwise speculation in American gambling counters. Too many of the bones of Fleet Street lie bleaching in Wall Street for the subject to be other than painful.

Not always did the enriched return thanks where thanks were due. Instead of being grateful to Lord Rothermere for their



suddenly acquired riches, there was a tendency to plume themselves on their own superior wisdom and intelligence ; whereas, the truth is that left to themselves they would have remained commonplace, comfortably-off journalists, dependent on retirement on their moderate savings.

At the height of the Fleet Street boom, which extended to several groups of newspapers, I was severely snubbed for suggesting that a blackboard, marked with the latest quotations, should be erected in every office for the convenience of operators, thereby saving them the trouble of ringing up their brokers, and perhaps leaving them a little time to spare for the work of their masters.

With fortunes being made overnight by gambling journalists, it required a steady nerve to stand apart from the turmoil of speculation. I know one man who did ; one who never bought or sold a single newspaper share throughout the whole hectic period. His name is Wallace D. Roome, Manager and Director of the *Daily Mirror* since 1903, and a charming and good-natured fellow to boot. To be inconsequential, what a record in longevity for so high a newspaper position is Roome's !

As for myself I was not far behind Roome. I had one newspaper deal only. I sold at a moderate profit the few *Daily Mail* shares which I had bought in Lord Northcliffe's time. Rumour, in my case always busy with imaginary attributions of wealth, swelled my share gains into legendary proportions. As I walked down Whitefriars Street, quite respectable men of blameless life took off their hats to me, much to my embarrassment. A newspaper acquaintance, known to mix only with the best people, slapped me heartily on the back, pressed a cigar into my hand, of which with difficulty I induced a postman to relieve me, and in the end had to be restrained by sheer force from carrying me off to lunch at Sweeting's. My son had the cheerful news broken to him that I must be worth at least £250,000. A little later the same knowledgeable people told him that they had found I was worth only £100,000. So heavy a drop in my reputed fortune was too much for my patience and vanity. Promptly I bade my son go back and demand what they had done with the other £150,000 !

From these slight glimpses into the newspaper scene of the decade 1923-33, it will be gathered that life under the new regime could be just as exciting and amusing as under Lord Northcliffe.

The Harmsworth tradition for hospitality was splendidly upheld by Lord Rothermere. Those who appealed to him were

always welcome guests at Stratton Street, Piccadilly; Maidenhead, Sunningdale, or Dornoch. One favoured Editor had an open invitation to spend every week-end at Sunningdale. Lord Rothermere was specially partial to Jimmy Heddle, for long Hulton's chief lieutenant in London, whose amusing stories, told with a broad Scottish accent of the right flavouring, kept him cheerful. It was on Heddle that he relied for the completion of the deal which transferred the Hulton papers from his own control to that of the Berrys.<sup>1</sup>

I knew Heddle in the Withy Grove days, and, more or less, through the Hulton years; always the same hard-working, earnest Heddle, with a welcome leaven of sentiment in his nature for the underdog. When, quite unreasonably, Hulton wanted to "fire" a good man, Heddle hid him. The sharp eye of the irascible baronet was not deceived. He sent for his henchman and demanded to know what was meant by this disobedience. "Well, guv'nor, you've found out," was Heddle's unequivocal answer. Faced with the necessity of the next move, Hulton wisely decided to do nothing. The man remained on.

Of Lord Rothermere's hospitality I have a memory of a breakfast when I solemnly ate grilled sole, and he a juicy pear; that and no more. I have seen him turn into an antique shop in Bond Street to buy a piece of Commonwealth silver; walk a little farther down to an art dealer's establishment to secure a Guardi or a Boudin; cross over to a famous provision store to order a hamper of delicacies, ranging from old Stilton cheese to *pâté de foie gras*, for a colleague who had done him a slight service, and finish up by borrowing a half-sovereign from a companion to help a specially sad fellow singing by the kerb-stone.

If I was not often in Lord Rothermere's company, I could console myself with the thought that rarely is a man a favourite in two reigns. That surprising figure, Sir George Sutton, upsets all precedents. He has been a favourite in three reigns; those of Lord Northcliffe, Lord Rothermere, and Lord Rothermere—Esmond Harmsworth. Indeed, studying my history, I find that the great French miniaturist, Isabey, who was a precarious favourite in four reigns, only beats Sutton by a pip.

My earliest recollections of Lord Rothermere go back to the

<sup>1</sup> Lord Kemsley now controls the former Hulton series of newspapers, his own and his brother's interests having been separated.

beginning of the century when, as a young man, he managed the affairs of the *Daily Mail*. I was always struck by the alertness of his step, as well as by the alertness of his mind. In the passing of the years I remember well the morning when he started his prosperous *Sunday Pictorial*. What a rush there was for the new paper ! With what delighted smiles did poor F. R. Sanderson, the Editor, and his lieutenant, Alexander Campbell, afterwards Editor of the *Daily Mirror*, stroll along the Embankment, to mark with their own eyes the unmistakable evidence of success ! That a newspaper founded with an outlay of £30,000 should have produced the enormous profits of the *Sunday Pictorial*, year by year, is surely one of the romances of Fleet Street ; only paralleled by the still greater romance of the *Daily Mail* which the two brothers started with a capital of £15,000.

By being a week in front of the Hulton Sunday paper, which made the mistake of giving a fortnight's notice of its début, the *Sunday Pictorial* reaped an inestimable advantage. Though for weeks secret experiments had been carried on in the office of the *Glasgow Weekly Record* which he owned, Lord Rothermere finally gave Sanderson only nine days in which to produce the *Sunday Pictorial*. It was these experiments which led people to think that he was planning a daily Scottish picture paper to forestall the *Bulletin*, then about to be published from the office of the *Glasgow Herald*. Without waiting for their new machinery, the *Herald* people came out forthwith. The production would have been all the better for being delayed ; but the Scots, wise in their generation, wanted to be quite sure of being first in the field.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### "THE GOOD COMPANIONS"

THE picture of Lord Rothermere, a synthesis of co-ordinated impressions, to which many observers have added their own individual touches, needs to be supplemented by a swift peep or two at the people he gathered round him, for they are testimony to his judgment. Of all, the most remarkable was Lovat Fraser, an erratic genius, sometimes mockingly referred to as "Lovat Paraphraser," a witticism prompted by his apt use of striking similes, always heavily italicised. Each week he wrote an article for the *Sunday Pictorial* which was supposed to interpret his Chief's sentiments, and his forcible English, and the provocative manner in which he supported his views, quickly won him a large and affectionate public. Previously I had tried in vain to induce Lord Northcliffe to let me use him on the *Dispatch*, but the invariable answer I got was, "We have enough trouble with Lovat Fraser's Monday *Daily Mail* article without wanting a Sunday article added to our anxieties. Better stick to your reverend gentlemen!" (Vale Owen.)

From long residence in the East, Lovat Fraser had acquired the manner, bearing, and instincts of a rich sahib. An aura of circumstance and affluence clung to all his movements. He felt totally helpless without a valet, and when travelling required a wardrobe as varied and as commodious as that of a Hollywood film star. When accompanying Lord Rothermere abroad, he allowed no consideration of their respective wealth and importance to interfere with the weight of his impedimenta. For every one box taken by his Chief, he would be accompanied by five. At the foreign ports where he landed, a gang of muscular porters, sweat dripping profusely from their faces, would be hired to wrestle with his swollen baggage. When slimming for men became fashionable, Lovat fell out of conceit with his bulky proportions, and went in for vigorous country walks. Temporarily he dropped his open car, to be followed, instead, by a great saloon, behind whose closed blinds, tired and perspiring freely, but radiantly happy, he would change every stitch of clothing on him, as though for all the world he were back in India.

The responsibility of supporting his daily life he left entirely to his faithful valet, who was supposed to be anything from sartorial expert to medical adviser. During a tour in the Highlands, Lovat suddenly signalled to the chauffeur to stop; then turning to the valet, he said, "Did you give me my medicine, this morning?" "No, sir," was the truthful answer. "Damn you," snarled Fraser, "tell the chauffeur to drive on."

Impressed by Lovat Fraser's ability, and entertained by his broad, boisterous personality, Lord Rothermere humoured him, even to the extent of overlooking his habitual disregard of punctuality. Whatever the time or nature of the appointment, Fraser would arrive late, always with a magnificent apology ready on his lips, unfortunately, only too sadly familiar—"My damn car has broken down." If it were mildly suggested to him that he should get a new and more reliable car, the pained look that overspread his face became his eloquent advocate, and you had the feeling of one who adds unnecessarily to the difficulties of a brave man courageously struggling with adversity.

Another notable member of Lord Rothermere's staff was Sir Bertram Lima. He had all the qualities which Fraser lacked, without any of his exuberance, being built in a mould from which eccentricity, or the more picturesque personal qualities, was wholly excluded. We must imagine him as the cold, practical, disciplined business man, and the splenetic Fraser as the typical, old-time journalist, full of rude life and bohemian humours. It is Lima's melancholy distinction to stand out in Fleet Street history as a signal example of tantalising fortune. On the eve of achieving the ambitions on which he had set his heart, with accumulated wealth running into six figures, he was stricken down, dying before he could enjoy any of the fruits of his labours.

Lord Rothermere, sensing Lima's promise, picked him out from scores of juniors employed by the firm, anticipating, significantly enough, his brother Alfred, who had reached the same conclusion about the young man. By various stages he raised him to the position of being his right-hand man, Lima responding with a tireless zeal that took no account of exertion or hours. Though repeatedly warned that he was overworking himself, he increased, rather than lessened, his energies. These ranged from directed supervision of Lord Rothermere's newspapers, to the sale of plums grown on his Chief's country farm. I liked Lima, although I am bound to say he impressed me as a hard and unsentimental bargainer, who, under the cover of exquisite politeness, offered you far less generous terms than you could obtain elsewhere. When he wished me to contribute a gossip

column to the *Sunday Pictorial*, he suggested a rate of payment which staggered me, and, believe me, after what I had gone through, I was not easily staggered.

Lima's colleagues often used to speak of him as the most brilliant amateur to enter journalism in recent years. Certainly no amateur ever achieved his prominence in so short a space of time. Though lacking the practical knowledge which comes from long experience, he possessed the gift of doing the right thing at the right time, a matter of instinct. When colleagues of mature years confessed to being in a quandary, that mother-wit of Lima would astonishingly help him to find a way out. By nature, timid and shy, he was driven to bold courses by an imperious will that was itself the instrument of an unflagging ambition, and of a supreme belief in his star. Not even the prospect of having his head punched by an incensed underling would outwardly disturb Lima. He might quake in his boots, but neither his face nor his manner would betray any fear. While some of the qualities of his mind could be traced back to his Latin origin, he was essentially a product of environment, drawing his particular upbringing from the society and example of his Chief, who, delighting in his progress, took an enormous amount of pains to develop him.

Both Lima and Sanderson (the first Editor of the *Sunday Pictorial*) were tragic victims of ill-health. Of the two I came nearer in sympathies to Sanderson, a man of forlorn and singular appearance, whose unprepossessing exterior gave little clue to his amiable disposition, and his gentle, inoffensive nature. The picture of Sanderson should be painted in warm, compassionate tints. He was one who never had an unkind word to say of any living soul. Always a broad humanity suffused his being. Whether knowingly he marched with death, or whether his fate was hidden from him, I know not; but when I leap the years, and recall the sudden flurries of colour in his face, it is hard for me not to believe that he must have suspected his doom.

We would meet as a rule on a Saturday in the Fleet Street tavern where we took our evening meal. In front of him there would always be a finger of brandy to quicken his flickering heart. At the sight of me entering the dining-room, his solemn countenance loosened into a smile, and he would prepare for a dose of broad Lancashire humour, warranted to give him five minutes' diversion. I shall always remember his smile—thin, like the gleam of a wintry sun.

In common with Lord Rothermere he possessed a tenacious

memory. When the *Sunday Pictorial* was prosecuted for some alleged breach of the Defence of the Realm Act, he recalled a several-months-old official communication, marked "Secret and Confidential," advising the very course to which objection had now been taken ; and, what is still more remarkable, remembered even where he had placed it for safety. Because his memory was better than that of the Crown, he won the day against the great Sir Richard Muir, whose case he completely demolished.

I always thought there was a seemliness, a poetical fitness, about Sanderson's last moments. They found him early one morning lying dead across the bed, a peaceful smile on his face, and by his side a bundle of proofs which he had freshly corrected. There was writing on the last proof of all. He had set his pencil to the sheet before closing his eyes for ever on printer's ink and all man's work.

Because Sanderson and Campbell came from the *Glasgow Record*, there were people in the *Mirror* building who took them to be Scottish born, and the possible forerunners of a formidable Scottish invasion. Yet one saw the light in Lincolnshire, and the other in Yorkshire. Even had they been born in Scotland, what odds ? Since when have English journalists been afraid of Scottish competition ?

Sanderson was followed on the *Sunday Pictorial* by W. A. McWhirter, whose quiet, engaging personality made an equal appeal to Lord Rothermere. His appointment was remarkable for answering widespread doubts whether in the Bouverie Street organisation there was a natural successor to the Editor who had just died. At the time a new picture paper threatened the most violent rivalry, and we can readily imagine with what relief Lord Rothermere realised that he could adequately fill Sanderson's place. Since those days McWhirter has displayed his resiliency in a number of important positions, from Editorship of the *Daily Mail* to managing-directorship of the firm's provincial properties. He began in a modest way on Lord Rothermere's Glasgow papers. Presently he was entrusted with the job of tempting away a "key man" from another office. Unfortunately the fish wriggled without being netted, and on his return to the office McWhirter found indignant wires of protest already pouring in from the aggrieved opposition newspaper. When simultaneously he received orders to place himself at Lord Rothermere's disposal in London, he wondered whether the protests had been duplicated to the fountain head. However

the summons had to do with altogether different business. He found Lord Rothermere with a copy of the newly-acquired *Glasgow Weekly Mail* spread out on the floor before him. Indicating it with his foot, he turned to McWhirter and said, "If I made you a gift of this paper, what would you do with it?" Presumably McWhirter's answer was convincing, for he was appointed acting-Editor on the spot, his salary was doubled, and, to complete his happiness, was told that Bertram Lima would provide him with a first-class dinner before he returned in modest triumph to Glasgow.



## CHAPTER XXV

### LONDON'S TALLEST STAFF

WHETHER Esmond Harmsworth, Lord Rothermere's son and heir, would remain in politics, take up journalism, or seek to combine both, was always a difficult problem. That in the end he was to give his allegiance to journalism, and definitely abandon active politics as a career, must be regarded as the most natural outcome of a conflict of interests in which the family traditions promised to be the decisive factor.

To attempt to remain in the House of Commons, while at the same time deputising in Northcliffe House for his father, whom subsequently he was to succeed as Chairman of the Associated Newspapers, would have meant taking on himself an unduly heavy burden, possibly injurious to his health. When he first associated himself with the *Sunday Dispatch*, he was still an M.P., and the claims of Parliament and journalism left him little time for leisure. He had a preliminary taster of newspaper life on the *Daily Mirror*, but his real beginnings were on the *Sunday Dispatch*, which he joined towards the end of the second year of Lord Rothermere's control. He enjoyed the experience, for he has confessed to me that the early *Dispatch* days are among the happiest of his memories. More quickly than one would have expected, he impressed his own personality on the paper, encouraging changes which voiced the interests and aspirations of the younger generation. There he was far better fitted than myself to be the guiding inspiration. Some of the ideas he introduced were to be permanently incorporated in the *Dispatch* make-up.

I thought it a fine thing that a young man in his position should wish to shoulder the double responsibility of active membership of the House of Commons, and energetic co-operation with his father in the newspaper field. There were people in Fleet Street who considered that the contiguity of the chief proprietor's son, "the young Guv'nor," placed me in a position of some delicacy, since, if I were to be perfectly frank, I must know when to turn from the office of mentor to the rôle of pupil, and vice-versa. However, the sense of humour which each discovered was not dissimilar, and possibly to the surprise of those in the newspaper

game who were but slightly acquainted with Esmond Harmsworth, and mostly knew me from hearsay, I not only survived, but saw our relationship prosper.

Mr. Harmsworth, like his father, has a conspicuous instinct for hospitality. I tremble to think of the numerous lunches I ate at Warwick House, his home overlooking the Green Park, and next door to the residence of Lord Beaverbrook.

That our taste in literature and works of art was often in agreement made these occasions congenial and enlivening. I have no doubt that Mr. Harmsworth found amusement in the reminiscences which I am easily tempted to draw upon, and I do know that he laughed heartily at sundry financial dilemmas out of which, having only a scanty acquaintance with the Stock Exchange, I had to be forcibly rescued.

We had now moved into the new building, which out of fraternal regard Lord Rothermere had appropriately named Northcliffe House, instead of "New Carmelite House" as originally proposed by others. The windows, which were screened by heavy plush curtains, had yet to be protected (as now) by cross-bars, and the night the Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward VIII, honoured us with his presence, I was almost precipitated on to the pavement below. Forgetting that the windows opened outward into the street, I carelessly leaned up against them, only to feel them swing backwards to my pressure. Had I not caught hold in time of the side of the wall, this book might never have been written.

. . . . .

Mr. Harmsworth's room, No. 1 on the Directors' corridor, was singular in having three doors. When the room was re-decorated, one of the doors was converted into a bookcase, a birthday gift from Mrs. Harmsworth. The three doors always reminded me of the enormous room with four or five doors which, in one of his impish moments, Lord Northcliffe hired in a Paris hotel for the purpose of frightening a member of his staff, who had incurred his displeasure. The culprit, ushered into this room, was told to wait. Every so often a secretary would appear at a different door to inform him that the Chief was in a terrible temper, but would see him presently.

Sir George Sutton, the Managing Director, was housed in the adjoining room, which, with an instinct for decorative effect, he

had hung with choice specimens of Walter Sickert's work, making it for a newspaper apartment artistically unique. From his windows he looked on to Tudor Street, his old place of work, where in the early days of Lord Northcliffe and Lord Rothermere, the Amalgamated Press, the congeries of papers of which *Answers* was the parent, had its offices. Here the Harmsworths effected their purchase of the *Evening News*; here they planned the *Daily Mail*, and the building called Carmelite House which was to shelter it. What area of the same restricted size could point to such journalistic achievement and progress! Every stone was redolent of magical memories. When Sutton moved into Fleetway House, the luxurious Farringdon Street offices of the Amalgamated Press—destined to become the largest periodical publishing business in the world—he must often have reminded himself that he had left the familiar spot associated with the Harmsworth luck. But in Northcliffe House, as Managing Director of the *Daily Mail*,<sup>1</sup> he faced once more the old Tudor Street offices, background of the most exciting, revolutionary chapter in Fleet Street history, and of the beginnings of his own long connection with the great firm. Never have I stood in Sir George Sutton's room, without feeling how crowded with emotional reminiscences was the view from his window. How many times must he have seen the two ambitious brothers, afterwards called Lord Northcliffe and Lord Rothermere, clamber up the steps opposite while making their astonishing bid for affluence and power! Where, even in the columns of the *Daily Mail* itself, is a story more romantic than theirs to be found?

Mr. Harmsworth's association with the *Dispatch* led to the staff being strengthened by a number of young writers—Lady Eleanor Smith, the clever daughter of the late Lord Birkenhead; the Hon. Patrick Balfour, Charles Graves, Gordon Beckles, and John Rayner, son of a former colleague, who came to us straight from Cheltenham College. No Sunday paper could boast a staff so young and tall as ours. When Esmond Harmsworth, Patrick Balfour, Gordon Beckles, John Austin and Viola Tree were joined by tall Sir George Sutton, my diminutive inches looked strangely out of place among these children of Anak.

Soon Mr. Harmsworth suffered the common fate of being pursued by the earnest tribe of amateur geniuses, but he dexterously side-tracked them, and they fell upon me. Some I found particularly virulent, altogether resentful of my polite intimation

<sup>1</sup> Sir George Sutton is now vice-chairman of the Associated Newspapers, Mr. Stanley Bell having succeeded him as Managing Director.

that were we to accept all the stuff that was offered to us, we should require a *Dispatch* with the same number of words as the Bible. If my troubles were to this extent increased, has not Mark Twain said, "a few fleas are good for the dog!"

In Charles Graves I found one who was the possessor of an extraordinary and intimate knowledge of the great and the near-great. His piquant additions to the information printed in Debrett would make that historic compendium one of the world's best-sellers. From him I learnt more about the Upper Ten and the lower and middle crusts of society than I had gained in the whole of my newspaper years. I suggest that, if he were to keep a diary, he would have posterity as much indebted to him as we in our time are under obligation to the Duc de St. Simon for enlightenment concerning the epoch of Louis XIV. To the entertaining conversation of Graves, I owe many a bright quarter of an hour, during which, Rasselas-like, I found myself transported into an entirely new world.

Whenever I was with Gordon Beckles,<sup>1</sup> I felt I had suddenly grown old, for in his jaunty manner I saw myself mirrored, as I was just twenty years earlier. No young man believes that an older man was ever his own age; no son cares to visualise his father as having once been at the same starting post. To exchange conversation with Gordon Beckles, always an intriguing operation, was to leave me with the impression that I had arrived at my years at one jump, without any merciful halts. If in fifteen years' time he should find himself talking to a correspondingly younger edition of himself, equally self-assured, I warrant his breast will not be uncharged with feelings similar to those I now express; then, perhaps, he will remember how *I* reacted to the implied challenge of his confident, assertive adolescence.

A day came when, who should arrive at Northcliffe House, but that brightest of writers, Edith Sitwell! The business she had come about was to discuss a literary and art *causerie*, which Mr. Harmsworth wished her to edit. I had to explain our requirements, and I imagine that my task was performed with a sincerity and a delicacy quite unaffected by her obvious amusement. That Miss Sitwell, whose cleverness I admire exceedingly, never forgot the experience was made clear, years later, when, as a footnote to a letter on another subject, she humorously reminded

<sup>1</sup> Now one of the *Daily Express* bright young men.

me of my attempt to induct her into popular journalism, a rash offence for which I can never sufficiently atone.

The bohemian element in the office was represented by Henry Doig, a barrister who had drifted from Dublin journalism to London, and "Seamark," the well-known writer of adventure yarns of the Jack London type. Doig had a fine collection of stories relating to my mythical, journalistic youth, which he retailed with great relish at Fleet Street gatherings over which his wit and mirth presided. Of the anecdotes relating to himself, the two following always seemed to me the most pleasing :—

Finding himself in New York, Doig invited one of the American newspapers to buy a news-article from him. When asked for his credentials, he gave a fervid description of his standing in London journalism. The following day another Fleet Street newspaperman appeared at the same office. Asked by the sharp lift-boy the usual question, he replied: "just say the greatest living journalist has called." The lift-boy took the message upstairs to the news-room, returning in a few minutes with the simple instruction, "Please step into the lift, *Mr. Doig.*"

Having "chipped" some of the officers of an Atlantic liner, Doig laid himself open to reprisals. Late one night he returned to his cabin to find, as he was beginning to undress, that there was a woman in the bed, apparently fast asleep. Thoroughly startled, he rushed on deck to inform the officer on duty of the strange occurrence. The officer had no compunction in pulling the fair intruder out by her feet. She offered no resistance and proffered no excuse, but throughout remained completely passive and speechless. With scant ceremony they carried her back to the women's hairdressing establishment where she belonged. *She was the wax model.*

Doig had a fondness for the company of Sergeant-Major Berks, late of the Guards, one of the original "contemptibles," who was a sort of office major-domo, besides being an excellent collector of unusual items of news. When I saw them together, I would say, "There they go, Mr. Berks and Henry Doig."

As for "Seamark," he could write the clock round. Elsewhere than in the office he pretended to be afraid of burglars, and kept a gun next to his writing-pad. When he bought himself a fast American motor-car, nothing would satisfy him but that I should witness its staying powers. Accordingly we took a spin on the

Embankment. At the first clear patch he drove in the accelerator with such force that we bounded forward at a rate well over sixty miles an hour. I said, "What the blazes do you think you're doing?" "Oh, I'm tickling her up a bit," was his reassuring answer. At Victoria we were held up by a traffic block, and I took the opportunity to alight, telling "Seamark" that I preferred he should do the tickling-up alone.

Having been a sailor he professed to be always hearing the call of the sea, mostly at hours when ordinary people like myself were sound asleep. If he heard the call of the waves at midnight, he would instruct a motor-car hire depot to send a car round at once, and forthwith be driven to Brighton, where for fully fifteen minutes he would listen to the familiar noise of the surf. Then, happy and refreshed, he would start back.

When it was not the call of the sea that was troubling him, it was the call of Paris. That meant taking a friend, usually a free-lance journalist, who, lured by the promise of all expenses paid, would be ready to start in the morning. And when it was neither the call of the sea, nor the call of Paris, it was the call of the boxing-ring, wherein as an amateur he had himself once shone. When Tommy Milligan was training in Scotland, "Seamark," being one of the punching volunteers, jumped over the ropes to "knock hell out of the champion" and retired with a jab that ought to have damped his enthusiasm for further experiences of a like character. Not a bit of it. Instead he tried hard to persuade a friend to follow his example. That friend wanted his face for a football match the day after, and feebly declined.

Edward Marjoribanks, who like "Seamark" was to have a sad end, flashed through the office, a strange, unaccountable apparition. Long before he thought of writing his brilliant "Life" of Marshall Hall, he had the idea of becoming a journalist, and reported for duty on the *Dispatch* with a copy of Thackeray's *Four Georges* in his hand. I suggested he might try his 'prentice-hand at interviews. Perhaps his distinguished relatives would help him. But he scorned the idea of their being put to such base uses, and arranged instead to experiment on an ex-Lord Mayor. He came back looking sorrowful and insulted, saying he had been unable to get past the butler; then, as casually as he had floated into the office, he floated out, having abandoned for the time being his ambition of becoming a newspaper man. Sometime before his death I saw him at his house in Victoria Square, S.W. He promised me then that, as soon as he was free, he would make another

attempt at journalism. His conversation, witty and colourful, had convinced me that he would make an admirable addition to the staff of any newspaper.

Twenty-three years of age when he joined us, Beverley Nichols had his first real start on the *Dispatch*. Job No. 1 was to interview a centenarian. Nichols arrived at the village where the ancient was supposed to reside, but could find no trace of the man. In the most melancholy tones the Vicar assured him that he must have got the name of the village wrong, since it was too unhealthy for any inhabitant to survive to sixty, let alone a hundred. There was a village of the same name some distance away. Nichols thought he might as well try it. The money in his possession being insufficient to buy him a ticket, he offered his gold cigarette-case to the station porter as security for the loan of two pounds. The station porter liked Nichols' honest face, and lent him the money without security. As the second village proved as unproductive in centenarians as the first, Beverley may be said to have begun his newspaper experience with a "stumer."

Once he had settled down, he showed himself an excellent journalist, especially entertaining with piquant glimpses into unusual aspects of West End life, whereby our startled and delighted readers were familiarised with an exotic modern creation whom he called "The Pale Lady." Meanwhile, anticipating me, the glamorous Elinor Glyn had persuaded him to sleep with his head to the North, and the world's greatest lover, Rudolf Valentino, had sought to convince him that suits of clothes should be purchased not singly, but by the dozen. Being in search of a tailor, Valentino agreed to try the firm which Nichols patronised, but the material he chose was of such a flaming type as to make it quite clear that, whatever Hollywood had done for him, it had not given him taste. The film "star" carried about with him a collection of forty or fifty photographs, and his chief anxiety was to learn which flattered him the most. Though not very interested, Nichols picked out one of Valentino in a cricketing shirt open at the neck. As for conversation, there was not a single remark by the great man which Beverley had cause to remember. Beyond vacuities he had absolutely nothing to say. Whenever he opened his mouth, it was to talk about tailors and his own photographs. So much for the world's greatest lover!

Having written his autobiography, a book of considerable literary merit, Nichols agreed to co-operate with Melba in the

production of her life-story. He was to receive half the proceeds of the book as payment for work that was to occupy him a whole year, and the "lady of many tantrums" perhaps a matter of six weeks. The writing would have taken only a sixth of the time had Melba been at all reasonable or methodical, but she preferred her dinner-table conversation to be the basis of much of the material, supplemented by such anecdotes as she chose to disgorge for the entertainment of her many guests. Even proof-reading proved too stern an exercise for the temperamental diva. From Evian-les-Bains came this distracting letter: "if you wish me to have nervous prostration, this correction of proofs will do the trick . . . please send no more. If you cannot come and help me, everything must be postponed. We must do this work together. Nothing must appear until corrections are made."

I paid Nichols a visit when he was living in Hasker Street, off Walton Street, having, like the new poor, converted a small house into an abode fit for heroes. My eye idly ranged over his furniture, many pieces of which he explained had been given to him by Melba. A retentive memory inventoried:

Item: A Marie Antoinette couch on which Melba had presumably slept.

Item: A Louis Seize ormolu clock, mounted with cupids.

Item: A small Empire desk on which was written in Melba's characteristic handwriting, "To dear Beverley, from Nellie Melba."

Two Guardi sketches, which, to the collapse of my own hopes, Beverley said he had left in his Will to someone else, completed the Melba benefactions.

The next time I visited Hasker Street the house seemed different. I missed the Marie Antoinette couch and the Louis Seize clock, and where were the Guardi sketches? Nichols noticed my look of perplexity. "The things have gone," he softly explained, "dear Melba, I think, was much too attached to them to suffer their loss permanently."

Temped by a good offer from Doubleday, Page & Co., who wished him to produce a new magazine, Nichols proceeded to America, to find in the land of fabulous opportunity that the lady secretary allotted to him was already the possessor of a fortune of \$75,000, made out of bank shares that had risen in the Wall Street boom, and that the office boy who answered the push-bell



was a capitalist with \$15,000 to his name. On being told that the correct thing to do was to buy the market leaders and wait for the "dibs" to roll in, Nichols turned his £7000 savings into Montgomery Ward and Internal Combustion stock, and before he sailed again for Europe found himself worth, *on paper*, £10,000 at the minimum, a pleasant thought to keep him company across the Atlantic. If money could be made so easily, it seemed foolish that people should ever trouble to work.

Back in Europe he accompanied C. B. Cochran to Paris, to inspect with him the latest theatrical shows, and, one afternoon, by way of killing time, looked in at a broker's office where the latest American quotations were posted up. He saw that Montgomery Ward had fallen, but, convinced that the drop was only temporary, proposed buying another two hundred shares. As he had forgotten to bring his passport with him, and therefore could not properly identify himself, the broker declined his business, much to Nichols' annoyance. Forgetting his passport, as things turned out, averted him the loss of £1500. The end of the American boom left Beverley a sadder, poorer, but wiser young man, resolved for the future to eschew Wall Street and all its lures. Any further money he made, should go, he swore, into solid bricks and mortar, and what is equally solid—life insurance.

Though, like most men who live by their pen, he has had his inevitable "ups and downs" yet Beverley Nichols can scarcely complain of his luck. Few writers have attached to themselves so many genuine friends. The morning after Cochran's 1930 Revue was produced at the Palace Theatre, Manchester, Nichols, while lying in bed, read the depressing newspaper notices. He was just beginning to feel utterly miserable, when in walked Cochran in his dressing-gown, by contrast cheerful and serene. C. B. had a piece of paper in his hand for Nichols to read, before it was sent out to the Press. On it were written these words:—

"Mr. Charles B. Cochran is so delighted with the work Mr. Beverley Nichols has done for his 1930 Revue, that he has commissioned him to write his next Revue."

That delicate little gesture is enshrined in Beverley's memory as one of the nicest things in his life.

When *Evensong*, based on his novel of the same name, was produced as a play, Nichols had many inquiries from people anxious to know whether the heroine was Melba. He did not mind these questions, which were natural and legitimate, but he did think the limit had been reached when a reporter rang up

to ask if he could throw any light on Melba's missing tiara. "I can only say that I'm not wearing it," was his effective reply.

Before he began to write the nature studies, which deservedly brought him fame and praise, Henry Williamson stayed with the *Dispatch* for a while. Having regard to his specialised talents he was scarcely in a suitable medium, and my inability to print all his nature contributions rankled, I daresay, in his soul. If I am judged, not by what I left out, but by what I put in, then he has no cause for complaint, and the image he retains of me, if not flattering, should, at any rate, be friendly. Like himself, I was the victim of a limited choice. How much rightful use of the space of a popular Sunday paper should enraptured observation of animal life command? My own fancy had a liking for the company of badgers, stoats, weasels, beavers, moles and other inhabitants of the country night, but hard news is uncompromising, and will only make room for its kind. At such times a weaver of supple and melodious prose, whose theme is the busy freedom of the humble fauna couched in the earth, falls by the way, and with bitter heart must watch the columns fill with more commonplace excitements.

The news-editor, Eric Ince, I would call, for want of a better word, a "go-getter," which is a borrowed Americanism. He had a passion for success, and owned most of the qualities which lead a man to that coveted goal. On his mantelpiece there stood an alarm-clock set for 6.30 a.m. No over-night engagement was ever sufficient excuse for disregarding its strident summons. Whizz went the alarm at 6.30, and three minutes later Ince would be in his bath, mind wholly concentrated on the material interests of the newly-born day. Next to the clock a photograph of Lord Northcliffe, his idea of a self-made man, kept a constant place, and on the other side rested a copy of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. A bright and breezy creature was Ince, thoroughly at home in the modern world of strident personalities. The figures of big Business answered to some mute appeal in his own nature, and he often pictured himself as a man of millions.

Across his visions of ultimate wealth ran the inescapable premonition of early death. Whenever his throat ached, and surgery was palpably indicated, the fear that he would never survive treatment made him hesitant and sad. On electing finally to have his tonsils removed—an operation most skilfully performed—his fears were realised. He fell a victim to the million-to-one risk; a clot of blood snatched his young life away. As a journalist a

light imagination led him to place high faith in the symposium, though the topics of his selection could often be considered an acquired taste. There was a Christmas when he sought opinions on "Kissing under the mistletoe," the prepaid telegrams he sent out reaching, among others, the sprightly and witty Lady Tree. She wired back, "Fie ! Fie ! Hie thee to a nunnery !"

Ince left us to become one of Lord Beaverbrook's city editors ; but later he joined up with a firm of city stockbrokers where his money-making gifts had full scope. He was in a fair way to becoming rich when he died.

In his premonition of death he reminded me much of Lord Northcliffe, who feared that he would never live to retire. When his usual cheerful spirits had deserted him, the Chief would turn to me and say, "I am always in trouble with my health, my eyes, my throat, my sleep. I shall not live much longer than my father, who was fifty-six when he died." To be sure of sleeping well, he employed a secretary to read to him far into the night, and, if the reading were from one of Thomas Hardy's novels, woebetide the poor amanuensis whose tongue stumbled over the Wessex dialect.

Arthur Mills, the novelist, took a turn with us. In a letter accompanying his notable book, *From Piccadilly to Devil's Island*, he paid me the compliment of saying that, since most of the contents had appeared in the leader pages of London dailies, I had evidence that the training he had received from me had been good. This is his memory of the *Dispatch* : "Having been fired from the reporting staff of the *Daily Mail* because, they said, I could not get anything of interest in the paper, I came to you for a job. You offered me space work—10/6 for each paragraph worth printing. I came in the news-room with six, written on separate pieces of paper, which I offered for your approval and acceptance. One by one you read them, and having applied to each the same remark, 'That's no good,' crumpled the lot in the waste-paper basket. When you were out of sight, I took a hurried kick at the waste-paper basket, and sent it from one end of the room to another, scattering the contents all over the place. Then I left, wondering whether it were not better to give up the idea of becoming a writer. I did not give up, and five years later I was able to send you a copy of my novel, *Pursued*, for which the *Daily Mail* had paid me five hundred guineas."

That, I suggest, is a slice of real life, worth yards of the usual fanciful stuff, which, purporting to be actual happenings in Fleet Street, is from time to time handed out to a credulous public.

While it is true that, to begin with, Mills walked a little unsteadily in the path of our Sunday journalism, he soon found his feet, and, both as a paragraphist and as a writer of articles on little-known phases of London life, he attained great fluency and skill. My chief trouble with him was that he could always find twelve reasons why an article which I suggested should not be written. Not that he morally disapproved of the idea itself; it was his own appropriateness for tackling the subject that raised doubts in his mind. As if a free-lance journalist should ever stop to reason why!

When "Seamark," the novelist, and Thomas Moulton, the poet, were regularly contributing sporting features, I had to endure the insults of a number of angry readers, who could not imagine what such literary gents could know about football and cricket. I made a point of answering their objections, and had the satisfaction of seeing them all become enthusiastic admirers of both writers.

The picturesque vernacular of the one, and the graceful, but spirited, prose of the other, were a welcome variation to the stodgy, stereotyped matter poured out by the hack sporting reporters. With their powerful help, the current football phraseology was robbed of many of its terrors. We refrained from stating that Everton started with the wind at their backs, and that at half-time the sides crossed over.

In the hurly-burly of Fleet Street I have yet to meet a gentler fellow than Moulton, or one freer from sharp edges. Whenever I was with him, his accommodating spirit seemed, by contrast, to rebuke my own stiff nature, yet I suppose, being such opposites, we found it easier to agree. Moulton has at least one possession which others might envy. It is a little book, the pages crumbling with age, that was a present from Gordon Craig, the genius in stage effects. Entitled *Propheties Perpétuelles*, by Thomas-Joseph Moulton, great astronomer of Naples, it dates back 400 years. That the Italian Thomas Moulton had gifts as a seer may be gathered from the success of some of his prophecies. For 1914 he predicted "Great combat," and "Révolution en des États de la Chrétienté." For 1918, "La paix sera entre les Princes Chrétiens"; for 1931, "Un papier-monnaie sera mis en circulation dans un vaste Empire de l'Europe"; while for 1933 his prophecy was, "Mort d'un Saint Roi."<sup>1</sup>

The versatility of Viola Tree put most ordinary journalists to shame. She wrote regularly for the *Dispatch*, maintained her

<sup>1</sup> Might not this be taken as a reference to Albert, King of the Belgians, killed by a fall in the Ardennes in 1934?

work as an actress, and ran a home for a family. Fate should have been kinder to one so deserving of its favours. Mingled with her busy existence was mourning for her husband, Alan Parsons, cut off, like so many talented people, in the early forties. Thinking how happy she had been in her marriage, and how much her partner had loved life, even her own valiant spirit must, momentarily, have quaked. But a woman of genius, who is also a woman of great courage, can be a match for outrageous fortune. Her friends, whom she has never disappointed, were sure that Time, which brings healing in its wings, would requite this warm-hearted creature for all the distress she had been occasioned. Was there ever such a one with money as Viola Tree? Perplexed, I would sometimes ask her, purely out of sympathetic curiosity, what she did with the sums she earned. It went. How? Who knows? One morning, her face wreathed in smiles, like one who has had a happy vision, she came to me and said: "you will be pleased with what I am going to tell you. I have arranged to employ an accountant, and every penny I spend shall go down in a little book." I replied: "another good idea would be to put down every penny you save," but that, possibly, would be too ordinary a way of life for Viola Tree.

We had a common interest in "Daddy," the great Beerbohm Tree, of whom we would often exchange reminiscences. On visiting Berlin the famous actor took Viola with him. Confronted with this six feet of English womanhood, the Kaiser exclaimed in his astonishment, "Na, sind Sie groszer als ich?" ("Are you really taller than me?").

Of the other interesting people of outstanding quality with whom my *Dispatch* work brought me into contact, one of the most remarkable was Kenneth Henderson, manager of the firm's legal department, a man of fine mind, much culture and admirable all-round knowledge. From his quiet manner no one would suspect that he was the possessor of an acute wit. When servants of the company of long service and high position were due for retirement, it was usually Henderson's delicate office to impart the news, and the manner in which he discharged this function was a tribute alike to his psychological skill and his adroitness. He began his task by an invitation to lunch at his club, *The Devonshire* in St. James's Street, which invitation his guest would accept in all innocence. In the course of conversation the artless query would turn up, "Where would one like to spend one's retirement?" Once the approach shot to the green of retirement

had been made, completing the hole presented no difficulty to the experienced Henderson. The victim would learn his fate in a way that saved him from shock.

I can imagine no auspices under which the actual process of retirement would be less disconcerting, or the negotiations that followed less mixed up with hard, financial calculation. If men have to be retired, then I recommend other firms to temper their communications with the same kindly sentiment that has prevailed in our business.

. . . . .

From the practice of using *The Devonshire Club* for these retirement talks, arose the office description of the club as "The Ministry of Pensions." To be seen lunching with Henderson at his club two days in succession was inevitably to start the rumour that "The skids were being fastened on to you." The Carmelite wits long asserted that the two most impossible tasks they could think of were, "Trying to pump Henderson," and "Getting a rise out of Sutton." Even against such an artful and assiduous cross-examiner as myself Henderson was steel-proof; yet how annoying to think that he is crammed full of curious stories, notably his experiences with Lord Northcliffe in America during the War!

. . . . .

Surely the most melancholy experience which life provides is to see the people you like taken away from you, one by one—dead before their time. For years that ardent Scottish politician, W. M. R. Pringle, was a friend in whom I discovered many attractive, intellectual affinities. We had our acquaintance first in the free and easy contacts which the busy journalist soon establishes with interesting politicians. His wit, his gift of raillery, his admirably furnished brain, all conspired to make an easy conquest of me. Thereafter, if only for the light he would throw on the often obscure parliamentary problems of the day, it was sheer delight to be with him. For hours at an end he would hold forth unceasingly, drawing, for the purposes of his conversation, on a classical mind that was a store-house of all imaginable knowledge. No man whose society I cultivated had a keener sense of historical perspective, or saw politics clearer as part of a loosely defined evolutionary system. Such was his passion for political discussion, that when he was recalling Chatham, Pitt, Peel, Gladstone, or any of the parliamentary giants of old, his eyes sparkled, his face was animated, and his whole body became charged with

electricity and excitement. Love of the political game ran in his blood and stirred his brain ; for him no other world existed than that in which men were arraigned in the forum, or assembled in the hustings.

Surrounded by sympathetic friends, Pringle, with their quick consent, assumed the appropriate role of interpreter and umpire of political battles of old. The growing pile of tobacco ash by his elbow marked the degree of absorption in which the lively intercourse held him. That he smoked too much was a warning often on my tongue, but Pringle never stooped to dull reason, being fellow with the Scots patriarch who, warned by his doctor that he must give up whisky drinking, promptly changed his medical adviser ; or with that other countryman who, told that if he did not stop the frequent dram he would go blind, remarked that, fortunately, he had seen all that was worth seeing. Yet it had been better if Pringle had listened, for in overtired moments the colour that crept into his face spoke of a heart that should not be unduly strained.

When we had agreed on an article which he was to write, and had some part of the morning to spare, often we would take a quiet walk together through some of the leafy London squares, and once more he would dwell on his beloved topic—politics. Ended are those mental pilgrimages for me who have seen so many dear friends laid in the cold grave.

There was a morning I remember well when Pringle appeared in my room, bristling with energy, fight and plans. Rarely had I known him to look so lively and buoyant. I made a humorous allusion to his outrivalling Sir John Simon, for he had taken up legal work again. He laughed, puffing vigorously at a great fat cigarette—like a burr the tiny detail clings to my mind. When I heard of him again his eager spirit had fled ; all that fierce vitality gone like a puff of wind. That in the shades his soul has the mighty dead he worshipped for company, and lacks not for an audience, sympathetic and appropriate,—this I would wish to believe, for unless one takes refuge in such fancies much that happens here below remains meaningless and cruel. Never does the omnibus that carries me to Kingston pass the peaceful cemetery in Putney Vale without I think of poor Pringle lying there so lonely and still ; his sharp, searching voice that often had rung out for my entertainment hushed unto eternity.

Lord Carson, though of a bitter tongue himself, counselled Pringle to moderate his caustic strictures. In the Parliament of

1917, when the younger man was most active, Carson said to him, "Why needlessly multiply your enemies with too much acerbity?" Pringle thought the advice good, but did not take it. The dangerous style was too suited to his moods and temperament to be dropped.

On the outbreak of the War, W. G. C. Gladstone, M.P. for Kilmarnock Burghs, fated to be killed in the field the following year, felt greatly tempted to attack Britain's decision to join in the conflict. But before committing himself he consulted Pringle, who said, "Do nothing of the sort. You would be far wiser to read and be advised by what your grandfather (W. E. Gladstone) said of Belgium."



## CHAPTER XXVI

### LIKEABLE SCOTSMEN

**M**Y friendship with Pringle was one of several pleasant intimacies with members of this gifted and conquering race. With good reason I could flatter myself on being specially endowed by nature to agree even with the most dour specimens from beyond the Tweed. In the whole of my life there was but a single Scotsman who had no use for me, and, if I had really tried hard, I really believe that I could have converted him into a friend. The fact that we got as far as exchanging courtesies—once he stood me a lunch, and once I stood him a cab—proved there was no insuperable obstacle to amicable agreement. But though in places our lives ran parallel, mostly they flowed out on different wave-lengths, with the will to harmonise obstinately absent. There is, of course, no law to make people like one another. Yet when for no obvious reason two men find themselves actuated by mutual intolerance, what more tragic commentary on human pettiness and man's eternal warring instinct must we seek? Whether or not one accepts these inexplicable antagonisms as unavoidable, the resultant friction must be regarded as sheer waste of temper and energy; as for the policy of knock for knock, it merely means foolish suffering for people who ought to know better.

Since my journalistic life has been largely bound up with Scotsmen, the fact that only one member of this incalculable race should have proved insensible to my blandishments is surely a matter for sincere congratulation.

Among the friendly Scotsmen to come my way I am happy to include Dr. J. M. Bulloch, the genial essayist, who, under the grave vestiture of learning and research, conceals a tender and playful temperament, to which my own moods can be swiftly attuned. Besides a refreshing streak of sentiment, far different from the mawkish brand popularised by Scottish humorists and comedians, I have discovered in him a passion for poetry, helpings from which have formed a sort of caviare to his conversation.

Certainly in a younger day he had John Davidson's best passages off by heart, and at the lunch restaurant under the Ludgate Hill arches, reeling off haunting stanzas by the yard, he reminded me vividly of my Kipling-obsessed friend, Harry Leatherdale, who knew all the Fleet Street waifs and strays :—

The adventurous sun took Heaven by storm ;  
Clouds scattered largesses of rain ;  
The sounding cities, rich and warm,  
Smouldered and glittered in the plain.

Sometimes it was a wandering wind,  
Sometimes the fragrance of the pine,  
Sometimes the thought how others sinned,  
That turned her sweet blood into wine.

Vehement conviction, coinciding with my own emphatic nature, informs all Bulloch's opinions. For a Scotsman, normally solemn-faced, he sees a joke with refreshing quickness, and with wholesome relish and a merry sort of cackle enjoys a sly allusion. If ever in the old days we ran short of a topic, there was always the wonder of Lord Northcliffe's life to discuss, varied by talk of Jews and Scotsmen. While canvassing with Bulloch the piquant theory that the Scots might be the lost Ten Tribes, I had this comment to offer : I had seen bearded Hielanders who were indistinguishable in appearance from venerable Hebrews, and in habits affecting money might be one and the same people.

Then there is Charles Beattie, long connected with the *Daily Mail*, whom I have known in a variety of capacities ; a walking encyclopædia of a man, with a faculty for learning foreign languages which I would gladly have stolen from him. In temperament and qualities of mind we are as distant as the poles ; yet in the long Fleet Street years, through some trick in the blood which I have never yet been able to explain, we were to find in each other sources of amusement, if not of profit. I made him laugh, and provided a Scotsman can be provoked so far, one may soon have the measure of his heart, and with patience and a fair sprinkling of cunning, the measure of his purse.

I have always regarded Beattie as an admirable illustration of what we mean in Fleet Street, when we speak of a man with " a nose for news." He could scent a good story a mile off. In the most innocently worded telegram he would often detect the makings of " a great splash " for the main news page.

As Night Editor of the *Daily Mail* throughout the four years' European conflict, he had probably the two biggest scoops of the War in his possession, but owing to the censorship was prevented from using either. When eventually the ban was lifted, what in each case twenty-four hours earlier would have been a magnificent "beat," was now common property. Only those who have experienced the stranglehold of the censorship can imagine the exasperation which must have possessed Beattie's soul.

One of his frustrated scoops was the Irish Rebellion in the Easter of 1916; the other was the 1917 Revolution in Russia, when the Tsar abdicated. In both examples the attendant circumstances have a human interest extending beyond the confines of journalism. Take the first, the Sinn Fein rising. Late on Good Friday, really about 3.30 a.m. on the Saturday morning, just as Beattie had his hat and coat on to go, the tape machine ticked out a bald message that a collapsible boat had been washed ashore on the coast of Kerry. It was a bolt from the blue, because Ireland, so to speak, was not at the moment being featured in the news. The lateness of the hour, the suspicious novelty attaching to the description of the boat, and the scene of its discovery, all suggested to Beattie that here were clues to important happenings.

But the censorship made it hopeless to telephone inquiries. All that could be done, in the short time remaining before the editions were run off, was to print the news, as received, in the Stop Press. Though all that fateful Saturday the message attracted no further attention, its mysterious contents dwelt in Beattie's mind. Elucidation came on the Sunday evening when Purser, one of the older reporters spared by the recruiting office, burst in on Beattie with the news, breathed under a pledge of absolute secrecy—its divulgement would ruin an official—that Sir Roger Casement at that moment was in custody in London, but not under his own name.

When last heard of Casement was in Germany endeavouring to induce British prisoners of war to join an Irish brigade, and it was clear to Beattie that the collapsible boat<sup>1</sup> which had been washed ashore had directly to do with his arrival. Furthermore, he argued to himself that Casement would have arranged his arrival in Ireland to synchronise with formidable movements in Ireland, of which the reiterated Sinn Fein mutterings had given England fair warning. It was certain that the Irish rebellion had

<sup>1</sup> Casement had been put off a German submarine in a collapsible boat which was washed ashore. It almost looked as if his German friends were glad to be rid of him. Later, Casement was discovered in hiding and arrested.

either begun, or was about to begin. To see if the "inspiration" stood up to other facts in the news-basket, he called for every scrap of Irish copy that had been released by the censor, and found much corroborative evidence. There had been the robbery of gelignite from quarries outside Dublin; an attempt to derail a train on the line to Cork; the mysterious drowning in the West of four unknown men whose speeding motor-car had failed to take the bend of a bridge properly.

Marlowe, the Editor, and Fish, the news-editor, were in agreement with Beattie that a psychological moment in the History of Ireland was at hand, and an elaborate scheme for covering all Ireland was drawn up, on the theory that alarming events had either taken place already, or were in prospect. I remember that of the corps of correspondents who went over to Ireland, Charles Hands, calm and smiling as usual, was the outstanding "star." Meanwhile, on the messages released by the censor, Beattie had built up a story which expressed the gravity of the situation, without exposing the paper to prosecution for shaking the public confidence. Naturally, no mention of the arrest of Casement was made. The proof came back from the censor, blue-pencilled from top to bottom, and however anxious the *Daily Mail* was to prove itself a well-informed and prescient newspaper, nothing it could do had power to change that disheartening decision.

The next day, Easter Monday, Dublin was in a turmoil, the Castle attacked, Stephen's Green occupied, the Post Office seized, but the censorship still held. It was Tuesday before the arrest of Casement was allowed to be published by the "dailies," and all that Wednesday's morning papers contained about the rebellion was a short, guarded statement from Birrell, the Chief Secretary for Ireland. When the ban on the Press lifted, the *Daily Mail* had the satisfaction of scoring with a full account of the uprising, some fifteen columns having been submitted to the censor, and nearly all passed. Each representative of the paper, following instructions, had brought back his own "copy," but in the case of the Belfast local correspondent it was the wife who had acted as messenger. With his customary generosity towards other journalists, J. L. Garvin went out of his way to congratulate the *Daily Mail* staff in Sunday's *Observer* on their fine news accomplishment, but how much greater would his praise have been, had he known the whole of the facts.

The second frustrated "scoop" followed at an interval of about a year. Towards the middle of March, a week or more after the return from Petrograd of Lord Milner, who had been sent out

to try and stiffen the Eastern Front, Kennedy Jones, then an Independent M.P., told Beattie that the expected Russian revolution had already begun, that the Tsar had been arrested and that there were grave disturbances in Petrograd. His news, though fragmentary and detached, could, he declared, be relied upon, albeit he was unable to disclose the source of his information. There had been an ominous suspension of telegrams during the preceding days, and the only message on the Russian situation to come through was a Swedish denial that anything untoward was happening in Russia. Private warnings from Hamilton Fyfe in Petrograd had put the office on the *qui vive* for an upheaval in Russia. To evade the strict Russian censorship, these instructions had been sent in code, one message running something like this, "Managing Director likely to resign; Chairman taking his place." That meant that the Tsar's abdication, and the proclamation of a republic, were possibilities of the near future.

Consequently Beattie did not hesitate to attach full importance to K. J.'s information. The problem was how to get the suggestion that the Russian Revolution was in progress safely through the censor's hands into the paper. Milner, with his understanding of the Russian situation, might have helped, but he could not be reached, and, when he turned to other quarters, Beattie was met with the argument that it was hopeless to put such news to the censor before the Government had issued a *communiqué*. That proved only too true. A far better fate than merely to be rudely squashed should have crowned Beattie's valiant attempt to work up a splash—from the significant silence that had fallen over Petrograd, and from the messages already released, with only the type display and the cautious wording to convey to the public that Russia was in upheaval. The censor struck out everything suggestive of revolution in Russia, leaving only the Swedish denial and the news of the "silence."

Twenty-four hours later the veil was lifted, and the delayed telegrams from Petrograd allowed to come through. Then it was seen that K. J.'s information about the revolution had been accurate, although as regards the Tsar, while his abdication was in process, it was premature to say that he had already been arrested.

Newspaper "scoops" are a fascinating topic, capable of infinite expansion. Where they are related to important moments in history, one has the feeling that the story behind each achievement often must have as much interest for posterity, as the actual announcement had for contemporary generations. It is not

difficult to imagine the sensation which three of the greatest "scoops" of *The Times* under Delane must have made, when first given out to the public of his day:—

The revelation of Peel's intention to repeal the Corn Laws.

The disclosure that Germany in 1875 was again preparing to crush France.

The news that the British Government had bought the Khedive's Suez Canal shares.

Even now it is a matter of conjecture how two of the three "beats" were obtained. The first is generally understood to have been a calculated indiscretion on the part of Lord Aberdeen, the Foreign Minister, designed to prepare the public mind for the coming reform; the second, according to de Blowitz, the famous Paris correspondent who gave Delane the news, came from the Duc Decazes, the French Foreign Minister; the third is thought to have been given to Delane by the Rothschilds.

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Speculation for long centred round the famous 1896 Hearst "scoop" in the *New York Journal*—the exclusive full text of the Anglo-American Treaty of Arbitration regarding the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana, an issue that had led to a dangerous pass in the relations of the two English-speaking nations. If there has been a satisfying explanation of the way the *Journal* secured the "beat," I have yet to read it.

The complete story of how the *Daily Mail* in October, 1924 obtained the letter of Zinovieff, revelation of whose subversive propaganda resulted in the Socialists being overwhelmed at the Polls in a flood of patriotic indignation, is likely to remain for all time a close secret. Only two or three people at the most know the full facts, and they will not reveal them. On the other hand, there is little left to tell of the plan whereby, despite the strictest censorship, the *Mail* was able to print, day by day, dispatches from South Africa reporting the progress at Vereeniging of the Milner peace negotiations with the Boers. By means of hand signals a man inside the camp gave out the news to another correspondent, who in turn cabled the information to a private address in London, the message being disguised as an ordinary gold-mining or Stock Exchange transaction, one of a hundred messages passing between Johannesburg and this country every day. The *Daily Mail*, having arranged the code, knew the exact meaning of each innocuously-worded cablegram received in this way. Unable to

guess how the paper was receiving its peace-news, certain contemporaries foolishly accused the *Mail* of manufacturing the daily messages.

The famous 1908 *Daily Telegraph* interview with the Kaiser, when the All-Highest referred to the English as being "Mad as March hares," has been followed by columns of matter throwing light on one phase or another. Since few interviews have ever caused such world-wide political repercussions, it would be interesting even now to learn what part the first Lord Burnham played in obtaining the historic "exclusive." What is it all a matter of sheer luck, or, as is generally supposed, the sequel to clever planning?

For having provided the London Press with many good "scoops," Wilhelm deserves to live long in the memory of Fleet Street. On March 6, 1908, in the last column of the leader page of *The Times* below the fold, and under a paragraph announcing that the solidification of Helium had been achieved, there appeared a letter of thirteen or fourteen lines brilliantly headed, "Under Which King?" and boldly signed, "Your military correspondent," which letter was destined to cause just as much commotion as the "Mad as March hares" interview already mentioned. The letter, whose publication had been delayed a day, said:—

It has come to my knowledge that His Majesty, the German Emperor, has recently addressed a letter to Lord Tweedmouth (he died the following year) on the subject of British and German naval policy, and it is affirmed that this letter amounts to an attempt to influence in German interests the Minister responsible for the Navy estimates.

In their first leader *The Times* remarked that they were in a position to confirm what their military correspondent (the famous Colonel Repington) had written.

I remember being struck at the time by the inconspicuous position which the letter occupied. True it was on the leader page, but would it have been thought sensational, even for *The Times*, had it occupied the top position, instead of being three-quarters of the way down the column? What was disclosed in *The Times* with such severe restraint, and of course with the most acute sense of responsibility, was developed and exploited in all the world's great newspapers in a fashion that accorded with the sensational character of the news. It was in this letter that the Kaiser rudely queried whether the late Lord Esher, deputy-governor of Windsor

Castle, was to be considered an authority on naval matters because he looked after the drains of royal palaces! I think it was Leo J. Maxse, the redoubtable editor of the *National Review*, who in a speech at Brighton some days later dropped the first hint that the Kaiser had made an abusive reference to an estimable peer.

Luck and the choice of the appropriate hour for operating both play an important part in the winning of "scoops." It was luck—catching President Kruger in the right moment—and, needless to say, enterprise, which brought the *New York World* on the eve of hostilities the famous message from the Boer President, "The price of war between England and the Boers would stagger humanity." That message had come simply in answer to a cabled invitation from the paper, which in keeping with Joseph Pulitzer's well-understood principles had been actively campaigning to prevent war in South Africa. Could even the most sanguine editor have anticipated such an historic reply to a cabled request for a message?

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On Friday morning, May 6, 1910, the *Daily Mail* and all the other "dailies," contained the official news of King Edward's illness. Andrew Caird, then Night Editor of the *Mail*, had formed the unwavering conviction that the King would die that same Friday evening, and on that assumption proceeded to produce a stand-by "death" edition, simultaneously with the ordinary edition. After each page for the ordinary edition was moulded, he had a different one cast for use in the eventuality of the King dying, which he was mournfully certain would happen. At 11.45 p.m. the news was flashed through that King Edward was no more, and with practically no delay, the "death" pages already prepared went on the machines, followed by the main page into which the actual announcement of the fact that His Majesty had passed away had been dropped. There was an explanatory note that the matter which remained, Imperial and world hopes for the King's recovery, had been received prior to the news of his death. That almost as soon as King Edward had died, the *Daily Mail* should be able to go to press with a paper completely modelled in the sense of that momentous news, was a notable instance of preparation and instinct serving journalistic ends.

Caird's biggest "scoop" on the *Mail* was the revolution in Lisbon, when King Manuel fled in his tiny yacht. He never betrayed to the staff the source of his news, but it was suspected that a friend in the shipping world had shown him a wireless



message from a liner in the Tagus, sent probably in breach of International Law. It was almost edition time when Caird got the tip. To prevent any possible leakage he shut the office, turned the whole staff on the news, and as a result of the combined effort evolved an impressive three-column story under the half-hour. The whole staff stayed on to produce fuller editions.

About 4 a.m., a tired Scottish sub-editor who was carelessly studying his copy of the *Mail* while riding home on the Brixton tram, was approached by a colleague on another "daily," who, looking over his shoulder, noticed the big headlines. "We haven't got that," he brightly exclaimed, but the obvious thought of discontinuing his journey and telephoning his office did not occur to his dull mind. When the incident was related to Lord Northcliffe, he did not smile. Instead he issued an order forbidding, under penalty of dismissal, any member of the staff taking home copies of the *Daily Mail* before the hour of London publication.

Similar tactics, i.e. shutting the office, were adopted by Marlowe in 1909, on the occasion of the *Daily Mail* "scoop"—the murder of Sir Curzon Wyllie at an India office reception at the Imperial Institute, South Kensington. Although the crime took place at 11 p.m. in the presence of hundreds of people, many of them English, it only occurred to one man to take the news to Fleet Street. Marlowe made him comfortable in the office while the facts were verified and developed in detail, and so well managed was everything that no rival got a clue until the first *Mails* were on sale. Never did such a "beat" of news take place right under the very nose of Fleet Street.

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There was an astonishing side to another *Daily Mail* scoop, the death of Muzafer-el-Din, the Shah of Persia, on January 8, 1907. The news, which was cabled by Sir William Maxwell, was secured in advance of the public announcement in Teheran. It reached the *Mail* about 7 p.m. That was a long time to keep the news and conceal the activity in the office. So, while the real news was being "subbed," there was set up as a precaution against leakage a fake proof announcing the assassination of the Tsar. But it had been forgotten that certain provincial papers were allowed to see some of the *Mail* foreign proofs, and their London offices were not warned of the precautionary "fake." One quick-stepping paper had actually a page ready for press, with the Tsar assassinated as its main feature. Fortunately, being eager for more of the good stuff, its sub-editors impatiently rang up the *Daily Mail* to inquire why the rest of the marvellous story was so

slow in coming ; then they were undeceived and the situation saved.

No telegram from a special correspondent could have passed through stranger adventures than the *Daily Mail* message from Amiens at the end of August, 1914, depicting the tribulations of stragglers from our Mons Army. It will be remembered as the telegram whose two opening sentences were, " This is a pitiful story I have to write. Would to God it did not fall to me to write it." Though published as a *Daily Mail* telegram it never appeared in the *Daily Mail* at all, but was printed in the *Weekly Dispatch*, and then reproduced in a special Sunday edition in *The Times*, as a " copyright telegram to the *Daily Mail*." A fuss was made in Parliament and in a certain section of the Press over the supposed note of excessive despondency running through the message ; yet it could not be denied that not only had the censor passed the telegram, but had added a note pointing the moral of the army's terrible ordeal. The message as printed was scarred with dots, showing where the censor had made his incisions, and it is a fair assumption that these dots increased the alarm of the apprehensive public.

The note, which accompanied the telegram on its return from the censor, bore the initials of F. E. Smith, afterwards Lord Birkenhead, who was Director of the Press Bureau, and read as follows :—

I fear I have left you a muddle ; but our present position must not be disclosed. Forgive my journalistic effort at the end, but that is what we want. I have passed far more than the W.O. (War Office) would sanction, but I think we should realise the " truth."

The " journalistic effort at the end " read :

England should realise, and should realise at once, that she must send reinforcements, and still send them. Is an army of exhaustless valour to be borne down by sheer weight of numbers, while young Englishmen at home play golf and cricket ? We want men and we want them now.

The telegram appeared in *The Times*, side by side with a message from its own War Correspondent, also wiring from Amiens. The two telegrams were not so much confirmation of one another as messages based on similar data, and viewing the situation from the same particular angle. In *The Times'* own

telegram certain passages had been cut out by the censor, but other passages which the sub-editors had crossed out were marked "stet" (reinsert) with the censor's initials, while fresh sentences, summarising the effect of the news and also pointing the moral, were inserted. In the fullest sense it was carefully edited for publication. That, under the circumstances, any attack should have been made on *The Times* or the *Dispatch*, was grossly unfair, and due to entire ignorance of the real facts.

*The Observer*, this same Sunday, came out with two special war bulletins in which J. L. Garvin was definitely revealed and established, both in his own name and in the rôle of Editor of *The Observer*, as one of the great clarion voices of the War. Attention was conspicuously drawn to the article headed, "The Climax of the War," occupying nearly the whole of the leader page. The reader was expressly told that it was by J. L. Garvin, the Editor, who had written not only the first clear and connected account of the British Army's most terrible and glorious week of fighting, but something as authoritative as if he had dispatched it from the field of action.

In its second war bulletin *The Observer* published the official statement, which had been issued in order to give the right perspective to the severe fighting, and to assure an anxious nation that a situation of grave peril had not only been retrieved, but the enemy fought to a standstill. So, having digested the *Dispatch* in the morning, *The Times'* special edition in the afternoon, and *The Observer* war bulletin with the official statement in the evening, the public, whose mood, during the long spell of mingled tidings, ranged from deep gloom to restrained hope, felt that it had done enough reading of war news for one day, and gladly sought its bed, praying before closing its eyes that never again would it be called upon to endure such a harassing and frightening Sunday. What Garvin, at his best a magnificent journalist, had written in ringing phrase was remembered, and throughout the four years' conflict, following this auspicious début, his views on the War commanded the widest attention.

The most wonderful photograph of the War, that of the sinking of the German armoured cruiser *Blücher* at the battle of the Dogger Bank early in 1915, was offered the *Daily Mail* for £5. Hannen Swaffer, who was supervising the *Mail* pictures, had just finished and was preparing to go out for supper, when, about 10 p.m., in walked a jovial naval man, accompanied by an equally cheerful friend, and smilingly produced a snap, about half the

size of a postcard, showing the men sliding off the careened sides of the doomed *Blücher* as she plunged—a marvellous titbit for any live picture-editor to behold. Wildly enthusiastic about his prize, Swaffer at once pooh-poohed the talk of a "fiver," said he would discuss proper business terms in the morning, and taking his two visitors to a near-by hotel saw them comfortably put up for the night. In the morning he had a contract of sale drawn up, and on Lord Northcliffe's instructions paid £300 down. The snap, which enlarged perfectly, occupied the whole of the back page. Reissued as a specially printed picture on fine paper, and published in the form of postcards, jig-saw puzzles and cigarette cards, it produced a handsome revenue in which the jolly sailor shared. His name, of course, was never divulged, and his future was not known to the office.

What a difference to human lives the introduction of the crossword puzzle has made! How many hundreds of thousands of people have been saved by it from utter boredom! And the innumerable nagging wives and provocative husbands it has kept quiet and amused.

Many newspapermen are acquainted with the publican, who was such a crossword "fan" that every moment he got to himself he devoted to working out *Dispatch* and other Sunday paper puzzles. If he happened to be stuck for a word, he would sing out to a customer, "I want a word of five letters, beginning with T and ending with M, meaning a hot drink." (I am inventing the question; so please do not trouble to work it out.) While always willing to help him, his patrons thought he would be better off with a first-class dictionary. A good idea, he agreed, but what dictionary? Only the best would do. They told him the best was "The Oxford," and without more ado he placed an order with his bookseller. In due course there reached him dictionary and bill, the one a trifling matter of ten volumes, the other a mere detail of £90. The publican was a sport. He paid the bill without a murmur, and decorated his back room with the ten hefty volumes.

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The start of the crossword boom in this country—not its origin which is disputed—arose out of a cable sent home by Sir Andrew Caird while on a business visit to New York in the winter of 1924. He noticed how engrossed subway passengers were in the crossword puzzle that occasionally appeared in the *New York World*, and it flashed across his mind, that what interested one hemi-

sphere might equally well interest another. So he cabled to Charles Beattie, giving the date of an issue with the puzzle which would have reached the *World's* London office, and recommended the adoption of the feature for the London *Evening News*. Beattie and Frank Fitzhugh (for eight or nine years now the Editor) put their heads together to devise the first puzzle. The happy idea came to Fitzhugh to offer a prize to the solver who contributed the best original crossword. Within a week of Caird's cable the correspondence was a whole time job for an expert. So rapidly did the craze catch on, that the *Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Dispatch* found it advisable to follow suit. Their example in turn was copied by other national newspapers, until crosswords became a settled part of the people's pastimes. Even the staid *Times* felt it necessary to row in with the rest, and adopted crosswords in 1929. How universal is their hold may be gathered from the fact that a distinguished judge in the High Court has been known to take a crossword to the Bench, to solve in his lunch interval.

In July, 1924, Jean Pierre Vaquier was sentenced to death for the murder of the landlord of the Blue Anchor Inn, Byfleet, after a trial which aroused much public interest. On hearing his doom the unhappy man struggled violently in the dock. It was afterwards explained to me that the miserable Frenchman had been the victim of a pathetic misunderstanding. As he was being put through the trap-door that led to the cells, he imagined that he was being taken straight to the scaffold. When it was made clear to him that he had several more days to live, and could also appeal against his sentence, he quietened down.

In my time I have seen many murderers put on trial, without ever feeling any inducement to examine, Dostoevsky-like, the chain of events leading to their degradation. Not that I was callous or hard; far from it. The fact is I was always too busy turning out "copy" to be able to combine the sociologist with the reporter. Mostly the men I saw sentenced to death were uninteresting studies, but one did provoke my curiosity. He was the heartless, mercenary scoundrel, George Smith, who, by ducking their heads under the bath water, riddled himself of the unfortunate, trusting women whom he exploited. I saw no trace of the hypnotism which was supposed to lie in his cunning, beady eyes; all I saw was fear and villainy. A more mediocre rascal could scarcely be imagined. How any decent woman could fancy him as husband was totally beyond my comprehension! Coming away from Bow Street, an old colleague, not given to romancing, started up a conversation on hypnotism, and had this little story to tell—*believe it or not*: In the days of the old horse-buses, when,

in order to talk to the picturesque drivers ladies made a dive for the front seats, he had known a humped Svengali of mean appearance, but extraordinary hypnotic powers, look up at a woman passenger and compel her to come down and join him. When I ventured to express incredulity, he solemnly assured me that he had actually witnessed the comedy.

In May 1926 came the General Strike and suspension of newspaper production. I was taking a month's holiday, spending it in a favourite way of mine—in walks in and around London. Thinking I could be of use to the office I returned to duty, and was at once packed off to Paris, accompanying W. G. Fish, then assistant Editor of the *Daily Mail*, and the two crack sub-editors of Carmelite House, S. E. E. Head<sup>1</sup> of the *Mail*, and A. L. Cranfield<sup>2</sup> of the *News*. We were to assist in an immensely enlarged production of the Continental edition, which was to be flown to London. As no boats were running to Calais, I suggested that we should charter a tug, which got us across by midnight, a time when the French sea-port town is neither lively nor inviting. Every place was full up; in despair we persuaded some small hotel-keeper to take us in. The room I was allotted was so small that to get out of bed I had to perform difficult gymnastic manoeuvres, otherwise I would have bumped my head against the opposite wall. I had the sensation of having slept in one of the tiny lifts installed in narrow buildings. On mentioning this unique bedroom to a friend, I was told that there were in existence much smaller rooms. In one case with which he was acquainted the bed exactly fitted the room. One backed in as on entering a garage, and then gradually lowered oneself into the horizontal position.

In Paris we were fortunate to have Lord Rothermere with us for consultation. The workpeople were being bombarded by class propaganda from London, but despite squeaks and alarums everything passed off satisfactorily. To celebrate the successful efforts Lord Rothermere gave us a lunch at the fine restaurant opposite the Senate, where I tasted the best caviare since leaving Siberia.

The famous *Daily Mail* leader, "For King and Country," refusal to alter which was one of the contributory causes of the General Strike, was inspired by the Editor, Tom Marlowe, who himself had a gift of forcible English, and could put a head-line

<sup>1</sup> Now Assistant Editor of the *Daily Mail*.

<sup>2</sup> Now Managing Editor of the *Daily Mail*.

on an article clever enough to keep you marvelling for an hour. Looking coldly back to those incredible events, I still fail to detect anything in the leading article to which sensible and dispassionate Trade Unionists could possibly take exception, quite apart of course from the understood rule that there must be no Trade Union interference with the Editor.

What else could a national paper, voicing the sentiments of the public, say than ? :

A general strike is not an industrial dispute. . . . It is a movement which can only succeed by destroying the Government and subverting the rights and liberties of the people. We call upon all law-abiding men and women to hold themselves at the service of King and Country.

On being confronted with the workpeople's ill-advised attempt to dictate what should go in the paper, Marlowe sent a proof of the leader to the Cabinet, then negotiating with the T.U.C. leaders. As the proof had been pulled on plain paper, Jix, the Home Secretary, rang up the *Daily Mail* for corroboration. The receipt of the leader, and the explanation of what was happening in the *Daily Mail* office, led Mr. Baldwin and his colleagues to refuse any further palaver with the T.U.C. until such coercion had been repudiated.

Events during this feverish week-end in newspaperland either struck the note of rich comedy or high drama. No objection was taken to the leading article in the *Sunday Dispatch*, though it was to the same effect as the one in the *Daily Mail* which had caused the turmoil. Again, while several of the Sunday papers were compelled to withdraw an advertisement issued by the O.M.S. (Organization for the Maintenance of Supplies) which enrolled volunteers prepared to help the nation to carry on, the *Dispatch* was not interfered with. The reason, possibly, was the mistaken impression prevalent among most people in the office that the copy had something to do with a railway advertisement. As a matter of fact the telephone operator had informed the Editor that the L.M.S. had been through, asking for space to be reserved for them. The mind and the ear play us funny tricks, and it is easier to grasp *L.M.S.*, which has a familiar sound, than *O.M.S.*, which rings strange and remote. At any rate, the advertisement was set up in the belief that it was an ordinary railway announcement issued by the L.M.S. (London, Midland & South Coast).

Though the Sunday following the General Strike decision the London printing of the *Daily Mail* was stopped, the Manchester

printing went on as usual, the Deansgate office being spared the distraction of propagandist messages owing to the thorough precautions taken by Sir Andrew Caird to ensure that no such communications got through from London. Not only was Marlowe's leader printed, but the final edition carried a full story of the strike in London—in the circumstances a remarkable achievement.

Besides being a distinguished Editor, Marlowe was a voice and a presence. His gruff, commanding accents struck awe into his subordinates, and impressed his equals. His presence always remained authoritative. Commenting on Marlowe's dignified appearance, Lord Northcliffe would often say, "He looks the part of Editor of the *Daily Mail*." Elstree or Hollywood in search of the ideal man to suggest the typical great morning newspaper editor need have gone no further than Room No. 1 at Carmelite House, where Marlowe sat enthroned in responsibility and state. In this huge department, which had been handed over to him by the Chief, the long approach to the desk seemed to give his personality the necessary atmosphere of respect. His flair for head-lines was no more than the knack of telling a story in two or three words, a most difficult art. Let those who question my statement take the main news head-line of a popular daily newspaper any morning of the week, and see if they can improve on it.

When Marlowe<sup>1</sup> could be drawn, he offered you excerpts from an unrivalled supply of entertaining stories, social and political, garnered in the long and fruitful years that he had sat in the editorial chair. If he felt particularly friendly towards me—and I never did anything to make him unfriendly—I was rewarded by some of the choicest of his memories, but when I suggested that he should write a book, and give his fascinating reflections a permanent form, beyond a gruff "yes," meaning "no," I got no further with my advice.

With his retirement there disappeared the fourth of the original Carmelite House "Big Five," the others being W. J. Evans, Editor of the *Evening News*; Sir Pomeroy Burton and Sir Andrew Caird, both on the managerial side; and Sir George Sutton, who, whenever Lord Northcliffe went abroad, held his Power of Attorney, and was therefore second in the hierarchy. He alone remains in harness.

*Apropos* Room 1:—Writing on business to Lord Northcliffe, I

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Marlowe died in 1936, having for some time suffered from heart trouble.



inadvertently used note-paper addressed No. 1 Carmelite Street, which some economically-minded clerk in the office had added to my stock of stationery. First came a mild letter of rebuke, followed up by a terrific wiggling on the telephone. "How dare you lay sacrilegious hands on my private note-paper?" demanded the irate Chief. "Don't you know, young man, that No. 1 Carmelite Street, is my address?" I pleaded that I had sinned in ignorance, not out of arrogance. None realised better than myself what an act of unforgivable presumption it was to have knowingly used his note-paper, even if only to write to him, but in my case, etc., etc. My apologies were eloquent and profuse that Lord Northcliffe burst out laughing, saying he did not believe I meant one word I said, which doubts, I assured him, made me feel my offence all the more acutely. At the end of the conversation I gathered up the whole of the note-paper that had been the cause of the mischief, and made a bonfire of it.

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Sir Pomeroy Burton, facetiously labelled by one of the opposition papers, "Heidsieck Bass," was a man of amiable temperament who got on well with most people. He wisely attached great importance to his health, and included riding, motoring and golfing in his exercises. On a fine morning he might be seen in the Row as early as 7.30 a.m., getting his liver into shape. As a result he usually looked ten years younger than his age. When Lord Rothermere took over the *Daily Mail* and the shares became very valuable, Burton, who was a large holder, became rich enough to retire to a magnificent villa which he had bought in the South of France. Now he could feel that he was in the same wealthy class as his old friend and former *New York World* colleague, (the late) Arthur Brisbane of the Hearst organisation, long reputed to be worth many million dollars in New York real estate. Sometime after he had left the firm I met Pomeroy Burton on the Cross-channel boat, and he showed me an ingenious pocket-book device for telling at a glance how much one was worth—the latest market value of one's share holdings, amount of cash on current and deposit account, etc. Naturally I was interested, but it did not help my case. I assured him that I always knew what I was worth, since my bank regularly notified all their clients how their overdrafts stood.

Lord Northcliffe used to tease Pomeroy Burton on his liking for golf, but insinuations and jibes had no effect on him. He just went on playing and keeping himself fit; a very sensible man.

I do not think that the Chief ever forgot that it was on his own

express invitation that Pomeroy Burton was induced to forsake American journalism and settle down in London. They first met in 1898, in the editorial room of the *New York World*, where for one night plain Alfred Harmsworth, as he then was, acted as Editor, with Burton carrying on as usual as news-editor. What Pulitzer who originated the experiment thought of the editing of his distinguished guest is not known, but it cannot be denied that the *World's* circulation hugely benefited.

For health reasons I moved to Eastbourne, and had some amusing experiences travelling up and down each day. On foggy mornings we might be held up outside London Bridge, close to a point where the chimney of a vinegar factory pierced the perspective. Spontaneously my fellow-passengers would cry out, "Vinegar Junction, all change!" which to me at any rate sounded funny. They had stories of Bottomley, and the 5.5 p.m. train to Eastbourne that stopped to set him down at Berwick, conveniently for The Dicker where he lived, and of the 8.33 a.m. from Eastbourne that stopped at Balcombe to pick up Justice Grantham, in his time the most criticised ornament of the Bench.

Monday, which is the Sunday newspaperman's holiday, was a day I spent motoring to the various show-places on the South Coast. Arundel, where the Duke of Norfolk has his castle, was an especial attraction. When the old black-bearded Duke was alive I would often meet him on the Embankment, taking a solitary constitutional, or peering into antique shops, for though he relied on a Bond Street specialist for his purchases, he enjoyed having a good look round himself. I found the Fitzalan chapel at Arundel arranged with a kindly regard for the old Duke's memory. His seat, they told me, was never sat in. Of the present Duke, so much younger then, who occupied the seat next his father's, the villagers had this anecdote to tell:—At sixteen he said to his mother, "They are discharging workmen from the estate. When I come of age I will reinstate them all, Mummy." They are a kindly race, the Howards, and this story goes well with their traditions. Each birthday a tribute of beautiful flowers is placed round the portrait of the late Duchess to show that she is not forgotten.

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When Horatio Bottomley was writing his prison memoirs for the *Dispatch*, I suggested the leading line in the advertisements on the hoardings should be, "I have paid." He agreed on

condition that the word "but" was added. The complete line then read: "I have paid, but——"

These four words, displayed up and down the country, were much commented on, and convinced me that Bottomley still retained his old journalistic ability.

An unexpected difficulty arose over the first instalment. Bottomley had written it in verse—*Songs from the cell*—which, if clever, scarcely fell in with my idea of what our readers expected. He was reluctant to substitute prose, but consented on my undertaking to distribute the verse over the various instalments. Never from his side, friend, devout admirer and champion, was that astonishing bohemian, Randall Charlton, tall, mysterious, unplaceable, promising once to be a first-class novelist, next looking like one of the great journalistic successes of Fleet Street, finally tailing off into an odd-job reporter. Whenever I saw him I had the feeling that I was talking to a picturesque character in an O'Henry story. None the less, a nice fellow, as gentle as his voice. When in need he applied to me, and I offered him work, gave him definite jobs to do, but what happened when he left my room I never knew; no copy came from him and no explanation. If, by accident, I met him again his conversation would be about the state of Fleet Street. Not a syllable about the state of Randall Charlton.

In the presence of Bottomley he was strangely subdued. When he heard me arguing over the first instalment an expression of horror stole into his face, and he held up his hand in solemn protest. "Really, Falk," he said in unconscious imitation of the heavy father rebuking the prodigal son, "really, you must not talk like that to Mr. Bottomley." I caught an amused glint in Bottomley's eye. Being always a man of the world, he hastened to smooth down Charlton's outraged susceptibilities, and I was able to get on with the business of the opening chapters.

Both are dead, and it will be long before Fleet Street sees such a strange duo again. Only the phrase, "I have paid, but——," of which I share authorship with Bottomley, lives on.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### FRIVOLITIES

THERE are always changes going on in a big newspaper office. Cranfield, who had been with me in Paris during the General Strike, left the London *Evening News* to become Editor of the Press Association, a fact which permits me to introduce the distressing story of the Bishop and the sausages. The room in which Cranfield was installed at the Press Association had formerly been part of the kitchen of the canteen. Being only two doors away, its appetising, though not always convenient, flavours percolated through to him. When the good Bishop of Norwich, who as everybody knows is a man of serious thought and demeanour, was being directed to Cranfield's sanctum, not only were his sensitive nostrils violently assailed by the pungent smell of fried sausages and baked beans (choice dish of the Fleet Street Olympians), but he was nearly bowled over by a hurrying canteen-boy, whose line of vision was temporarily obscured by a large tray heaped up with the same dainties. That episode brought matters to a head. At the next Board Meeting of the P.A., with Sir Charles Hyde of the *Birmingham Post* and Sir James Owen of the *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, among the attentive listeners, Cranfield unfolded the lamentable happenings, adding, that as long as his room remained next to the canteen, danger was always to be apprehended. Without delay a magnificent new Editorial room, wholly smell-proof and at a safe distance from the track of rushing tray-boys, was ordered to be put in hand. Cranfield, who had won such a splendid victory for order as against odour, did not stay long enough with the P.A. to enjoy his triumph. He came back on the *News* as deputy-Editor.<sup>1</sup>

On the modest Manchester weekly paper that gave me my first lessons in journalism, my duties, for which I was paid 5s. a week, included, as I have already said, reading and correcting the proofs of patent-medicine advertisements. I never got as far as interviewing sufferers miraculously restored to health. Here Cranfield beat me. He actually recorded at first hand the story of one of the

<sup>1</sup> After being Assistant Editor of the *Daily Mail* for some years, Cranfield was appointed to his present position, that of Managing-Editor

cured, a maid-of-all-work to a chemist. That honest tradesman, like all careful employers, required first to be assured that whoever came after his household treasure should be on lawful purpose. Not the least surprising feature of the epic struggle with illness was that, before taking the physic the girl had positively loathed the domestic cloth and pail ; now, complete with the pans, buckets and shovels of her craft, she found an almost inhuman delight in climbing, half-hourly, two flights of stairs.

After which frivolity I come to the important matter of *The Intimate Papers of Col. House*, publication of which caused such a flurry throughout two hemispheres. The Colonel will be remembered as the close friend and adviser of President Wilson, who during the early part of the War flitted from capital to capital, gathering unbiased impressions.

After reading the two volumes carefully through, a distinguished Liberal politician said, "They contain one untruth. *He claims to have silenced Mrs. Asquith.*"

The passage that excited this comment read, under date February 21, 1916, as follows :

I went to Mrs. Asquith's for tea. I was nearly an hour late. She was alone and waiting for me. . . . She started to criticise the President, for she has a free tongue and says what comes first to mind ; *but I silenced her* by saying she did not know conditions or anything of the situations, nor did she know what the President had in mind, and had gotten the usual prejudiced view of him which was untrue and unfair.

(Page 193, Vol. 2.)

Since I am on the subject of Mrs. Asquith, I may say that at different times I asked her to write for the *Dispatch*. While insisting on the telephone that she was not a money-grubber, which nobody who knew her well would ever suspect, she had an admirable sense of business, and would not budge from her stipulated price of £100 per contribution—not always convenient for a Sunday paper to pay. Curiously enough, Mrs. Asquith had the idea that anything written about her by a close friend, had almost as high a market value as an original contribution from her own frank and characteristic pen. Thus when witty Lady Tree, whose contributions I valued highly, wrote for us her impressions of Margot, an old friend, we had to make it clear that our usual, generous rate for special articles would not be exceeded.

During the run of the successful but gloomy series, entitled

"When I am Dead," in which well-known people in all stations of life gave their views on survival, I reminded Mrs. Asquith of an implied promise on the telephone to contribute. She wrote back that I was mistaken. She would never do anything so foolish. Lady Oxford did me an injustice. Her remarks taken down at the time were, "It is a strange subject for me, as I am full of life, but will you send me some suggestions?"

When the first batch of her entertaining reminiscences in the *Sunday Times* appeared, Lord Northcliffe thought it a great pity they had not been secured for the *Dispatch*, and said he told Mrs. Asquith that he would gladly have paid her twice as much. If he did not actually deliver this message, then, I can only say, that such was his intention.

Comparable with the excitement that Margot's reminiscences caused, was the furore that followed publication in the *Sunday Dispatch* of the impulsive and typically outspoken reflections of Queen Marie of Roumania. In at least one Court where the paper was eagerly perused for these piquant confessions, it was sarcastically asked, "What does the Queen mean by saying that she has not met her soul-mate? What about King Ferdinand?"

. . . . .

In declining an invitation to contribute to the After-Life series, the late Lord Knutsford, who for years begged with such eloquence and success for the London Hospital, said it was extremely difficult for him to refuse any request from Carmelite House, as the Bees in that hive had been so kind to him for nearly thirty years, but, as he was so well known, he was reluctant to thrust his views upon the world, or do anything to shake the belief of people to whom the hope of a second life gave immeasurable happiness and comfort.

He was a great humorist, and with mock pathos would appeal to my better nature to spare him the attentions of my staff. He told me he was once hurried to the telephone on the plea that somebody from His Majesty's Government wanted him. He rushed in, believing it was the case of the Garter or O.M. at last, only to hear the disillusioning message, "The Government have prohibited the importation of gin, what is your opinion?" Of course our news-hounds must seek their prey, but there should be an age limit. He went on to promise that, if ever he wanted my help to get his views to our thousand million readers, he would not be backward in coming forward.

While I was at lunch with Lady Islington, the conversation

turned on famous beauties we had known. I remarked that the most stately beauty I remembered seeing in society was Lady Ripon. My remark pleased at least one member of the lunch party, Lady Juliet Duff. At the end of the meal she came over to me and said, "That was very nice of you. Lady Ripon happened to be my mother."

. . . . .

In my more affluent days I patronised the same barber's shop as the fastidious Arnold Bennett, whose dressy appearance was matched by scrupulous attention to the care of his face, hands and hair. It has happened that we have been accommodated in adjoining chairs. While I never failed to notice the presence of my illustrious neighbour, the attendant, all of a quiver with the importance of his news, would whisper in my ear, "That's Arnold Bennett next to you." As we swung together in our respective chairs, heads almost touching, I would observe with unholy pride that, in the sweeping up, his shorn locks were being indiscriminately mingled with mine, barbers' brooms having no nice sense of caste distinction, and I would be led to wonder whether in Stratford-on-Avon the same fate had befallen the hairs of gentle Shakespeare—to be carelessly swept up with unwanted locks, raped from the heads of uncouth, Elizabethan gamekeepers.

Only once did the *Dispatch* compete for Arnold Bennett's services. For the rest we left him to our rich relative, the *Sunday Pictorial*, which could better afford to pay his price of £170 per article.

. . . . .

Sometimes there waited on me a barber with memories of the great Dr. Davidson, who was so long Archbishop of Canterbury. Though he had but six hairs left to his pate, His Grace would have them regularly barbered, and snared into position by cunningly manipulated creams. Vanity had little part in these attentions. Rather was it the desire of His Grace to unbend to an ordinary everyday person, to ask an average man, such as a working barber can claim to be, how he fared in the great world, whether he had a liking for flowers, with what number of children he had been blessed by God, etc., etc. Archbishops, like millionaires, have often a preference for the company of humdrum people with whom they can relax and be at their ease.

My memories of Dr. Davidson are painfully tied up with a wild-goose chase during the War, on which he unwittingly led me. On the strength of a fine sermon which I had reported for

the *Dispatch*, we were persuaded that he would be good copy, whenever he spoke. So, when he was announced to preach in a remote country town, down I went in expectation of another certain column, only to find the sermon that he delivered was word for word the same as the one we had already printed.

We all have our pet ideas. If I were asked fairly and squarely to mention the article in the *Dispatch* which pleased me most, I should answer the one entitled, "Has a millionaire a soul?" which arose out of a vigorous speech by Robert Smillie, the miner's leader, denying any such possibility. I invited all the millionaires of my acquaintance, some twenty at the most, to come to the rescue of their much-maligned class. The first nineteen one and all declined, preferring to remain in safe obscurity. The twentieth, the breezy north-country shipowner, Lord Runciman, was quite willing to step into the breach, and his reply to Smillie was effective and shattering. The job of finding the right millionaire I intended for A. J. Russell, the tallest man in Fleet Street, but it was little to his taste, and soon afterwards he left us to join the *Express* office, where after a term as manager of their Sunday paper he joined the Oxford Group. His book, *For Sinners Only*, which describes the life and work of the people in this singular-minded movement, has developed the status of a best-seller, a sign that Heaven has smiled on his pen. In this missionary enterprise it seemed to me that Russell had found at last a fitting vehicle for the activities of his soul and mind. I had always known him to be eager for religious experience, and after he had left us I would run into him in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where, his drooped head immersed in weighty contemplation, he would discover little taste for my light-hearted, worldly persiflage. As a footnote it might be recalled that in an earlier day the Russell family owned The Smoke Shop in Fleet Street—a popular rendezvous for journalists.

Though journalism is varied and exciting enough for most men, one still finds newspapermen who hunger for entirely different interests in life. Some take to the law, others to the Church, not a few to trade. In the case of John Rayner, already spoken of as having sub-edited the *Dispatch* Einstein "scoop," the transition was to pictures. He went into the art business, taking over a gallery and its contents from a dealer who had just held a successful show of Sickert's pictures. This enterprising fellow had seen lying about Sickert's shelves a mass of unsold canvases, and on offering £50 for the lot, had, to his astonishment, been told that they were his at the price. There were fifty-one pictures in all, of



which he retained fifty ; the odd one he gave away to a well-known artist. The following day a rich art collector called on Sickert to buy some specimens of his work, but was referred to the art dealer who had just paid £50 for the entire contents of the studio. His first deal was to give £100 for one of the fifty canvases. It was the exhibition of the forty-nine remaining pictures that fired Rayner's ambition to be an art dealer. Here, he thought, was an adventurous calling where a fortune was to be won more easily than in journalism. He bought a cheap Sickert for me ; afterwards I went along to the exhibition, and bought four more. When my friends first cast eyes on my purchases, they concluded that I had gone stark, staring, raving mad. Later, when Sickert was famous, these same friends withdrew their remark about my being mad. They said I was merely cunning.

In the simple fashion I have mentioned, began a liking for Sickert's work that has only increased through the years. Since I made my early purchases, recognition of his great gifts as the most original living painter in this, or in any other, country has become general, filtering through from the minds of the discerning few to the minds of the great majority of collectors. That the art-loving public should have taken so long to discern his genius, delaying recognition of his merit until he was past sixty, is not surprising to any one acquainted with the history of painting. Poor judgment on the part of picture-buyers means the loss of opportunities that never come again. Pictures by Sickert, which, as lately as 1922 could be bought for £30 or £40, were, in a matter of four years, to bring under the hammer ten and twenty times as much. It was my good fortune to buy typical works of the painter when his prices were low and adapted to my slender purse.

Sickert must have spent a fortune in taxi-cabs. In Barnsbury,<sup>1</sup> where he lives, the taxi-drivers have long regarded him as a sort of fairy godfather, the reason being that Sickert never walks when he can ride. Having met a friend with whom he wished to have a quiet talk, he suggested that their best course would be to sit in a cab. Accordingly a taxi-cab was hired, the driver's instructions being to drive round and round Buckingham Palace until he was told to stop, an order which he carried out to such purpose that he must have become minutely acquainted with every separate brick and stone.

Age has no terrors for Sickert. Not long ago, being then over seventy, he bought a new house in order to be rid of the worrying

<sup>1</sup> Since this book was written, Sickert has removed to Thanet.

feeling of being in a place with a lease of only twenty-one years to run.

No more than his friend, the late George Moore, could tolerate contradiction, can Sickert abide troublesome people who insist on arguing with him. He likes to lay down the law, not to have it interpreted to him. He hates to be asked how a commissioned picture is progressing. His fixed opinion is that a true artist cannot paint to order, or command at will the necessary inspiration for the best work. The muse of painting, if she is to give out her most radiant smile, must be gently wooed, not rudely coerced.

"I have known Sickert, bored with signing etchings of his works, suddenly fling down his pen with the exclamation, "Rembrandt never signed any of his etchings, why should I?"

The windows in his new house being too low on the street, he had them partially bricked up to prevent anybody peeping in. But the remedy was almost as bad as the disease. Without putting himself to great trouble, he could no longer see his regular taxi-cab arrive—an awful calamity. To readjust matters he invented a piece of furniture, standing on which he could look far out into the street. Not to be thought greedy, he had a similar piece constructed for his wife, who is of slight build. Now he can survey the prospect from one side of the window, and she from another, without quarrelling whose turn it is ; above all, he can tell whether the inevitable taxi-cab has arrived.

When his wonderful portrait of Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies the actress, now in the Tate Gallery, was on exhibition at the Wilson Gallery in Ryder Street, St. James's, Sickert astonished the journalists by sitting on the floor, Eastern fashion, and expounding its merits.

As for Augustus John, some of his best work has been picked off the floor of his studio by sharp-eyed dealers, who had previously been informed by him that there was "nothing fresh." I have known them take away a picture without waiting for John's finishing touches, and sell it just as it was. In their opinion the canvas did not require anything further done to it.

I knew the eccentric Dutch painter, Matthew Maris, one of three famous brothers, who lived for many years in Westbourne Square. When he died I wrote a long appreciation of him for the *Dispatch*, which greatly pleased Lord Northcliffe. Maris occupied

the second-floor flat of a tenement house. Seated at his window he would find amusement in seeking to distinguish, above the traffic roar of Paddington, the excited voices of youngsters at play in the adjacent streets. That tiny boys and girls should appeal to the quaint little man was not strange, for all his life he had taken refuge in the visions which come natural to children. His wistful imagination was never more at home than when voyaging among enchanted castles and fairy landscapes. The visions which he transmitted to his canvas came not from dull, workaday reality, but were stolen from fairyland, or from a world of his own creation that had learnt the secret of eternal youth, and lay lapped in idyllic innocence. From enchanted turrets princesses gazed towards magic dells. There, fabulous princes, dight in medieval armour, impatiently awaited the joyful moment of reunion. Butterflies trailed a myriad-hued splendour beneath translucent skies; chubby children, all dimples and pink health, who had crept out of Hans Andersen's fairy pages, held out greedy hands in expectance of the winged delight. Through his window the little painter with the gleaming eyes saw no sordid universe of ugly chimneys, black smoke trails, grey roof-slates and telegraph wires; only the sunny pleasaunces fashioned by his own romantic imagination. The ability to lose himself at will in a fairyland created by his poetical fancy, compensated him for the conscious hours spent amidst sombre bricks and mortar. Humming an old Dutch or French folk-song as he mixed his paints, and companioned by glorious visions, he was always happy and at rest in his alien surroundings.

I wanted to buy a picture from him and showed him what money I had brought with me. He laughed. "Put it back in your pocket," he said. "Don't you know I never could paint. If you are seeking a good painter, there is my excellent brother, William. He is good." I protested my desire for his own work. He waved his hands helplessly. I must be quite mad; anyhow, he had nothing to sell. I pointed to a picture on his easel. The answer was that it was unfinished, might never be finished, and in any case was not for sale. Seeing my look of bewilderment, he explained that one might work a lifetime on a particular picture without finding the necessary inspiration properly to finish it. Three times he had washed out what he had painted there, for the right touches continued to elude him.

With terrific vehemence he went on to explain that he did not need money; indeed had not wanted money for a long time. A friend in Holland allowed him sufficient for his small requirements. Picture dealers came and bothered him, but he regarded them all

as a particularly obnoxious lot. When he was younger they took his paintings, worth at the most £100 or £200, and sold them for thousands of pounds to people who could not have known their proper value. Never would they get any more of his work. And as long as he lived, the dealers never did. For the sake of his fame it was just as well, for the later work of Maris was too shadowy and ghost-like to please the taste of the connoisseur who knew his earlier and lovelier compositions. Despite his eccentricity and unreasonable outbursts against the dealers, who, after all, merely adapted themselves to market values, Matthew Maris was a lovable personality. The few friends who cherished his company affirmed that, for charm and depth of character, there was no one like the little painter, whose sparkling eyes, touched by the light of genius, still haunt my memory.

I would sometimes discuss art matters with Lord Dewar, the whiskey millionaire. He refused to believe that Landseer values had permanently slumped, and insisted that the "Monarch of the Glen," for which he had paid many thousands of pounds, would always be a good investment. As for his 24,000 guineas' Raeburn which makes the Haymarket a place of joy, he wondered whether association with whiskey would affect its market price. My reply was that I could readily imagine several millionaires being willing to give him a profit on what he had paid; furthermore, that the McNab was a unique work of art whose desirability the uses of commercialism could never lessen. I was under the impression that Dewar proposed leaving the Raeburn to the nation; I was mistaken.

Dewar was best worth listening to when he could be induced to talk of his early days in London. He told me that he had to work extremely hard, and was far happier than when he found himself with far more money than he could possibly spend. If I met him at lunch time, he would invite me to "share a bite" with him at Scott's in Coventry Street. After one course he had usually to rush away, and I found lunching with him bad for my digestion.

. . . . .

As a reporter I often interviewed Sir Thomas Lipton, without getting very close to his sympathies. The ex-Empress Eugénie, who took a personal interest in the sporting baronet, told him more than once that he ought to marry. To make her advice more persuasive, she offered this explanation: "if a man waits until he is sixty to marry, his young wife will possibly have no children."

If he waits until seventy to marry, his young wife will most certainly have children."

With two stories of art dealers and artists this chapter may be fittingly rounded off. A West End dealer was trying to sell a rich American a male portrait by Romney. The prospective customer grumbled at the ugly face of the sitter. "Ugly!" exclaimed the dealer, with well-feigned indignation. "Ugly! How can you call it ugly? Look at me!"

A famous artist falling into a chronic state of hard-uppishness regularly pledged his canvases. The pawnbroker's assistants grew so used to his visits that they did not even trouble to disturb the packages. The artist died and the paintings which he had pledged were got ready for auction. When the brown paper wrappings were torn away, it was discovered that many of the supposed paintings were just untouched canvases.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### BACK TO LIFE

THE robust people who enjoy the blessings of good health never realise how much they are to be envied. Rarely do I remember feeling quite well. I was a leaking kettle which one day was sure to crack up. But whatever was coming to me delayed its approach until my forty-eighth year. While holidaying in Malvern, I fell so desperately ill that for months there ensued between a C<sub>3</sub> constitution and lusty death a ding-dong fight, the result of which seemed a foregone conclusion. Glimpsed through my bedroom window, the towering Malvern hills and the peaceful green pastures made me feel that, if I had to die, here, surely, was the ideal setting for such an end. By all the rules of the game I should not have survived. When I had won through, I gathered that the odds against my recovery had never been less than ten to one; that there was a time when I was practically dead, and that in my state, to have emerged safe and sound meant that I had cat's blood in my veins, i.e. nine lives. Medical skill assisted to save me; the untiring attention of the Matron, Mrs. Battrum, who had been one of Nurse Cavell's helpers in Belgium, and the solicitude of her devoted staff, played an important part in my recovery; nor should I overlook the contribution of my own wife whose quickwittedness brought Lord Horder to my side. His advice, soothing personality and after-care did much to encourage me to fight on. The office, from Sir George Sutton downwards, behaved with exemplary kindness; the manager, Stanley Bell,<sup>1</sup> was most solicitous, sensing, I wager, that he would miss my regular morning banter along his corridor.

I will confess that I was not resigned to dying. The thought of the tiny paragraph headed, "Death of a London Journalist," piqued my vanity and further strengthened my resolve to get better. A humorist once gave as his reason for not dying that he was too weak to draw his last breath. Largely that must have been true of me. There were days when I hovered so perilously on the brink that it seemed the faintest breath of wind must thrust me over. My own physical feelings, as well as the unmis-

<sup>1</sup> Now the Managing-Director of the Associated Newspapers.

takable atmosphere of apprehension about me, left me in no doubt as to my critical state. When I was closest to death, that sense of falling down a bottomless well, a feeling that steals out of increasing weakness, grew terribly oppressive. The journalistic part of me was puzzled at the discrepancy between my own sensations, and the prevalent belief that to die is to feel oneself transported over the housetops.

. . . . .

The ennui which so frequently marks the last stage of a fatal and prolonged illness was not part of my experience. Fighting to live I was too busy to be bored ; sleepless nights never sapped my will-power. Out of my own struggles I grasped the significance and reality of the will to live. The persistency of purpose which I had acquired as a newspaper reporter bore me through. Had I been cast in a different temperamental mould, I am certain I should have died. There was a day, when, having drunk quarts of boiling coffee to revive my failing heart, I was advised by the matron to shut my eyes and go to sleep. I tried to sleep, but the thought that if I once dozed off I should never awaken, frightened sleep away. To keep fear out of my brain I concentrated my thoughts on the books I had read ; marched and remarched typical scenes in the office through my mind ; fell to wondering what the Mall looked like ; recalled, though without much zest, some of my humorous interludes with Lord Northcliffe. Yet when favourite passages of reading reverted to my brain, those would stay longest which I wanted most to forget. Many times there would pass and repass through my mind the poignant phrase used by Paul Deschanel to describe the death of Gambetta :—"A woman kissed him on the forehead, and he vanished into the darkness for ever." And often with silent lips I would find myself reciting as at school, where it was our set piece, that magnificent relic of Elizabethan prose, Sir Walter Raleigh's apostrophe to death :—

O eloquent, just and mighty Death ! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded ; what none hath dared, thou hast done ; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised ; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet*.

Even in my condition the rich melody of the words, rather than their sombre wisdom, charmed my mental ear. Through many

sleepless nights I repeated, as in youth, Swinburne's superb morsel of rhetoric :—

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean ; the world has grown grey from thy breath.

How can I tell by what alchemy these fond tenants of memory were marshalled in my suffering, except that the words had a fine resonance which consorted well with the mood of a gravely ill man, whose instinct at such moments is to dramatise himself as the victim of a pitiless destiny ?

I survived ; became well enough to be moved to Folkestone, and in the vigorous sea air, feeling some of my strength return, I smiled to think that I should see Fleet Street again, hear the welcome clitter-clatter of the printing machines, and listen to the familiar voices of my colleagues whom I sadly missed.

Excitement being second nature with him, the convalescent journalist makes an intolerable patient. The fight with death over, I became bored, having little to occupy my mind beyond reading, waiting for the next meal, and trying to forget my physical discomfort. In the circumstances, for anything unexpected to happen was a God-sent diversion. When the glazier came to repair my window sash, I could have thrown my arms round him, so great was my thankfulness. His quick way with the cords, and his terse conversation freshened by contact with busy men, revived for an hour my faded spirits. With what joy I pointed out to him another window sash to need his nimble fingers ! How slyly, as he worked, did my experienced tongue ply him with questions, wresting from an honest and unsuspecting brain the secrets of his most astonishing craft. Poor man, he thought that he was amusing a weary invalid eager to be entertained, and did little guess that a cunning journalist had him by the throat, and on a particular morning would turn him into a newspaper article as easily and as mercilessly as the chef turns eggs into custard. Shame on me, I say, that so hard on my recovery such guile should be in my soul !

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Of the kindly courtesies of those dark days two things I am soonest minded to recall—the receipt of a large bunch of muscat grapes grown by my old friend and colleague, G. Ward Price, in his own sunny Thames garden, and the arrival of a “round robin” from the mechanical and composing staffs of Northcliffe House wishing me a speedy recovery.



The grapes should have tempted the palate of the weariest sufferer, but not in my condition. Yet, that so thoughtful a gift should not go to waste, I got the nurses to press the juice into a glass, and each day, thinking of the Pharaoh of old for whom Joseph performed the self-same office, I sipped a tiny quantity.

Always in my remembrance of this versatile newspaperman who fulfils with such *élan* and skill so many journalistic functions, I shall be swayed by the vision of those grapes, which, in an hour when my spirits were lowly and sad, came as a pleasurable reminder from the outer world that I was not forgotten.

The "round robin," signed by men with whom I have often exchanged humorous pleasantries, did more to cheer me up than medicinal syrups, teaching me what a fine humanity resides in the heart of the average British craftsman ; how soon he responds to the dictates of a common, human fellowship. These printers, compositors, stereotypers, and machine men, from whose side came the only favours ever to pass between us, were kinder to me than men, who though deeply in my debt, did not once trouble to inquire whether I was living or dead. Like the Duc de St. Simon, I should wish, if the occasion arose, to be considered an honest hater, but some people are not worth honest hate ; one just despises them and dismisses them from one's mind. To understand that human nature can be despicable, as well as splendid, I did not need their example. Yet, to give way to such reflections, were to take leave of my sense of humour and become embittered. I will only say this, and pass on, that I should loathe to think that I could ever grow so callous.

Among the names to the "Round Robin" was that of Tom George, the head printer, whom I had known for nearly thirty years. When the first of the improved mangles for moulds was introduced into Carmelite House, Lord Northcliffe brought a distinguished Chinese mandarin to the stereotyping room. On being shown the new mangle, the unimpressed Oriental shook his head. "We have had that kind of thing in China for over two hundred years !" he remarked in his low sing-song voice. The indignant overseer, Tom George, protested that the mangle had only just come on the market. The slits of the mandarin's eyes ominously tightened. Quick as lightning Lord Northcliffe drew him away. Then, turning back to Tom George, he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, "For God's sake, George, hold your tongue. In China, where his word is law, you would be bowstringed for daring to contradict such a powerful man. Sixty thousand men wait day and night to polish off foolish people like you who answer him back."

The overseer breathed a sigh of relief at the thought that he was in London, and not in China.

In Tom George's early days the *Daily Mail* machines helped out the Saturday printing of the *News of the World*. One Tuesday a *Daily Mail* machine-minder called for a re-cast of a page, half of which was filled by an advertisement that had appeared in the previous Sunday's *News of the World*. The stereotyper took up a mould containing the particular advertisement, sent it down to the machine-room, and the usual procedure followed. Looking carefully through the first edition of the *Daily Mail*, the vigilant Night Editor nearly tumbled off his chair to find, at the top of one of the pages, the words, *News of the World*, and beneath it, to the extent of half a page, typical matter suited to a lively and piquant Sunday journal. What had happened was quite simple to understand. Deceived by the half-page advertisement, the stereotyper had picked up a *News of the World* mould, in mistake for one of the *Daily Mail*.

Once cured of my illness, I was reminded by the contrast in our respective fates of the tragedy of that genial humorist, Twells Brex, who as a final contribution to the *Dail Mail* wrote an account of his dying reflections, which was headed, "Before Sunset." If ever a man was possessed of the right spirit, it was Twells Brex. He faced death, bravely and serenely.

When he knew that he had not long to live, he wandered as far as Golder's Green Crematorium. Encountering one of the workmen, he asked him with his customary banter what the charges were. The fellow had an equal sense of humour. "We charges six quid, mister," was his reply, "if we has to bring yer, but if yer comes yersel', the charge be only five quid." That Twells Brex should himself tell the story and with ardent relish, too, was surely proof that the thought of his impending end had not affected his love of a good joke.

In my absence from Fleet Street the *Dispatch* was admirably carried on by the deputy Editor, W. H. Taylor,<sup>1</sup> an excellent journalist with more friends and well-wishers than any other newspaperman in Fleet Street. No office earthquakes had taken place anywhere. The same people sat in the same positions of authority. Pulvermacher, the acting Editor, encouraging me to write for the *Daily Mail*, printed an article in which I made

<sup>1</sup> Now on the *Sunday Express*.

suggestions for brightening up nursing homes. These hints, I was afterwards told, considerably amused the medical and nursing profession, which smiled hugely at my audacity.

Pulvermacher's promotion had come with the retirement of W. G. Fish, who had been Marlowe's successor. Fish was the last *Daily Mail* editor to sit in Lord Northcliffe's old room at Carmelite House, the room with the gilt decorations and the greeting of welcome, "Salve," which when the Chief was alive was always filled with beautiful flowers. In its original state the ceiling was adorned with Botticelli cupids, but Lord Northcliffe had them removed, saying that they were too frivolous for a serious business such as newspaper production.

When Lord Northcliffe went to Printing House Square he placed the room at Marlowe's disposal; thereafter it was assumed to be the permanent apartment of the editor of the *Daily Mail*. It is a safe guess that nowhere else in the world had an editor such elaborate, spacious and imposing surroundings. When Northcliffe House was ready for use, Fish forsook the big room [now reserved for Board meetings], for one in the new building; then astonished everybody by keeping his vow to retire at the end of three years as Editor, though still remaining a director of the firm. Not everybody with his prospects, young appearance and splendid vigour, would have been so resolute about retiring at fifty-five.

When he was news-editor of the *Daily Mail*, Fish won general admiration by the skilful manner in which he worked out the probabilities in crime mysteries. Of his acute mentality he furnished a good example by his dispositions in respect to the murder in 1910 of a colliery cashier on the N.E. Railway. The victim was found shot in a slow train between Newcastle-on-Tyne and Morpeth, the motive being robbery, for the wages' bag containing several hundred pounds was missing. Fish argued that the murderer could not have known beforehand at what point on the journey he would get his opportunity, or at what station he would be able to alight. Therefore it was tolerably certain that a ticket had been handed in for a station *before*, or *after*, the alighting point, and in the former case, excess fare paid. This sensible deduction Fish wired to all the station masters on the route, and his reasoning was later justified up to the hilt. The murderer, Dickman, took a ticket for a station short of Morpeth, i.e. Stannington. Between Stannington and Morpeth the cashier was murdered. Dickman alighted at Morpeth and

paid 2½d. excess fare from Stannington. He was arrested, to pay in due course the penalty of his crime on the scaffold.

Heaps of people, I dare say, will lay claim to the credit for the world-wide popularity of the War song, "It's a long, long way to Tipperary," but, in my own mind, I am satisfied that Fish is entitled as much as anybody to the distinction of having helped to establish its fame. It first came under his notice as one of the picturesque features of an early War message from George Curnock, most resourceful and alert of newspapermen, who immediately grasped its significance. The first army, he wrote, were singing the song on their way up to the Front from Boulogne. As news-editor of the *Mail* Fish seized on the information, visualised "Tipperary" as a great national stimulative, the possible British counterpart of the *Marseillaise*, and to his delight found Lord Northcliffe, with his fine flair for judging the public mind, equally enthusiastic. The words and music of the all but out-of-date pantomime song were secured and prominently displayed in the *Mail*, and from that day onward it was constantly on everybody's tongue. Viewed at this distance of time, to splash "It's a long, long way to Tipperary" may seem obvious news-editing. If it were so obvious, why was the *Mail* allowed to be the first in the field? No, as Lord Northcliffe would say, "that bird won't fly!"

It was Fish to whom Lord Northcliffe addressed himself, when rising magnificently to what seemed a minor accomplishment in the air, he showed, once more, his astonishing journalistic genius for sensing the future. The story has been given in several versions, but the simple facts are as follows:—

The *Daily Mail* in November, 1906, printed a half-column message which was most inadequately described as, "Airship Triumph," to the effect that the airman, Alberto Santos-Dumont, had flown some two hundred yards in twenty-one seconds in a heavier-than-air machine which he had constructed. The story was inconspicuously featured on the main news page under small type head-lines. About 7 a.m., that same morning, the Chief, thoroughly alive to the importance of such news as that the first heavier-than-air machine had actually flown, rang up Fish with the remark, "The best news in the paper you have put half-way down a column." (Fish, of course, was entirely blameless; the fault lay with some drowsy sub-editor who had utterly failed to appreciate the historical significance of Santos-Dumont's accom-

plishment.) "A man with a heavier-than-air machine has flown. It does not matter how far he has flown. He has shown what can be done. In a year's time, mark my words, that fellow will be flying over here from France. *Britain is no longer an island.* Nothing so important has happened for a very long time. We must get hold of this thing, and make it our own. I will think out what is best to be done."

. . . . .

In two days' time, Lord Northcliffe had determined his course. Employing the modest type display that was then the fashion, i.e. small, single column headings, the *Daily Mail* announced the offer of a prize of £10,000 to the first person to fly in one day from London to Manchester, two stops being allowed for petrol; rather an amusing condition to recall in view of to-day's aviation accomplishments. In the picturesque phrase of the *Daily Mail*, the aeroplane of Santos-Dumont was spoken of as "the motor-car of the air," and prompted by the fast-travelling mind of the proprietor, the paper visualised the terrific congestion in the ether that would follow inevitable aerial developments. When in 1910 the prize was won by Paulhan, the French flyer, Lord Northcliffe turned the laugh on *Punch*, which in scorn of the *Daily Mail* offer had proposed three prizes of £10,000 each: (1) To the first aeronaut who succeeds in flying to Mars and back within a week; (2) To the first person who succeeds in penetrating to the centre of the earth in a fortnight; (3) To the first person who succeeds in swimming from Fishguard to Sandy Hook before the end of the year 1909.

. . . . .

Always possessed of great strength of mind, Fish displayed this quality early in his career on the *Daily Mail*, when as a reporter he deliberately "forgot" an express instruction from Lord Northcliffe. This was that the word, "laughter," in brackets, must not appear in the reports of evidence, as was the usual practice. If the case were amusing, argued the great journalist, there was no necessity for interjecting the word "laughter"; if it were not amusing, then its use made the paper look ridiculous. It so happened that Fish had to report a case in which Lord Northcliffe himself gave evidence—a case affecting palmists at the Clerkenwell sessions. Subpœnæd as a witness for the defence, he greatly amused the Court by his clever answers. In writing his report, Fish put in the forbidden "(laughter)" where it applied. The great man, of course, noticed the inter-

jection running right through his evidence, but said nothing. From that day onwards no more was heard of his instruction, and law-court reports appearing in the *Daily Mail* were furnished with the familiar "laughter" in brackets. Incidentally this job of work was the first means of favourably bringing Fish under the notice of Lord Northcliffe.

. . . . .

The *Daily Mail* printed a letter from a reader, obviously of the highest discrimination, proclaiming an article of mine on Lytton Strachey to be the best piece of writing that had appeared in the *Daily Mail* for many a long year. Whether by accident or design, most people in Fleet Street failed to observe the important testimonial, and I had serious thoughts of having the letter reprinted and distributed, but on mature reflection decided that it might look conceited; so abandoned the idea.

When "Pulver" left Northcliffe House, he had completed thirty-two years with the firm, and I and a great many more felt that a landmark had been wrenched away. My mind went back to the far-off days, when as Kennedy Jones's office-boy, "Pulver," among other duties, ushered in important people. Among these was Cecil Rhodes, who had the unique satisfaction of reading his own obituary notice, kept in anticipation of the event in the Rhodes biographical envelope in the *Daily Mail* library. The chief librarian, Miss Griffiths (still there), who waited on the great imperialist, was one of the few women then serving a Fleet Street newspaper in an important capacity. How things have changed since! Speaking of *Daily Mail* obituaries reminds me of a "scrapped" edition which had contained a whole page death notice of Kipling, inserted on the strength of an American cable, happily corrected in time, announcing that his serious illness in the States had proved fatal.

. . . . .

Pulvermacher's boyhood included a job on the soon-to-be-lamented Sunday *Daily Mail*, which expired a week before the Sunday *Daily Telegraph*. In sorrowful commemoration of the mournful event, the witty compositors at Carmelite House produced the following memorial card:—

No more sorrow  
No more woe  
The *Sunday Mail* has had to go.  
Other papers needn't laugh  
Presently the *Telegraph*.

A youth of eighteen, Pulvermacher temporarily took over the *Daily Mail* late-man's duty, i.e. watching the news tapes through the night. About 4 a.m. there casually strolled in a dusty figure enveloped in a motor dust-coat—there were no tarred roads then—and wearing a tweed cap whose ear-flaps served the purpose of wind screens, then non-existent. In an imperious voice the intruder, after a quick glance at the young man, asked who was in charge. "Pulver" modestly signified that he was. "You!" exclaimed Alfred Harmsworth. "You! But, my good fellow, what would *you* do if the King died?"

"I would do this, sir, and that, sir, not forgetting to turn the column rules, sir," was the confident answer.

"Quite right, my lad, quite right," responded the great man. "Good night to you, my lad," and the owner of the *Daily Mail* vanished through the door, relieved to find his paper in such safe hands, still more pleased to think that the experiment of driving up from the country in his Mercédès "to see what those dash fellows got up to in the night" had not shaken his faith in the efficiency of his organisation.

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In the equipment of an up-to-date journalist, Lord Northcliffe attached particular importance to the ability to write catchy bills, and to the possession of a good head for catchy headlines. Enterprise in either respect was actively encouraged.

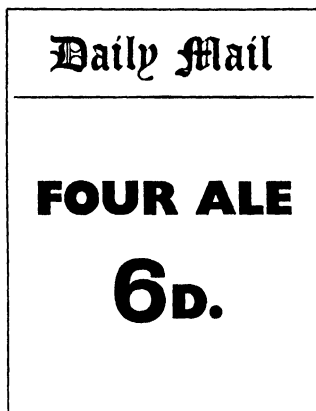
During the War the two bills which attracted most attention were :

<p><b>Ebening News</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>DOWNING ST.</b></p> <p><b><u>STILL</u></b></p> <p><b>THINKING</b></p>
--

<p><b>Daily Mail</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>YOUNG</b></p> <p><b>POLICEMEN !</b></p>
--

The one<sup>1</sup> referred to the interminable discussion over Man-power in the Asquith Cabinet, the other to the desirability of sending young policemen to the Front.

When Lloyd George put up the beer tax, "Pulver's" bill was :



After a quick success with some public fund that he had promoted the Chief liked a simple bill, such as :



<sup>1</sup> Lord Crewe, referring to this bill in the House of Lords, said : " I noticed on the Contents Bills of a popular newspaper these words, ' Downing Street still thinking.' That is, of course, a grave charge to bring against almost anybody. I have no doubt that the conductors of some of those popular newspapers, and not a few of their readers, cannot be accused of any excessive emulation of that dangerous practice."



In April 1908 the Prime Minister, the dying C. B., having tendered his resignation, King Edward, then at Biarritz, called on Asquith, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to form a Government and bring along his list of Ministerial changes. Such a departure from precedent as the appointment of a Prime Minister on foreign soil greatly intrigued the journalistic world, and down to Biarritz went a horde of newspaper-men, including Charlie Hands, representing the *Daily Mail*. By a quaint coincidence the *Daily Mail* placard, announcing the King's reception of Asquith, read as follows :



When that same year the German Government, increasing its naval programme to four capital ships per annum, threatened to outstrip us, the public demanded we should reply with the immediate construction of eight Dreadnoughts. "We want eight and we won't wait," became the popular slogan.

Lord Northcliffe, to give impetus to the agitation, ordered the *Daily Mail* bill to appear with just the figure 8. Unfortunately, the sub-editor who commissioned the bill forgot to repeal another order of the Chief, which was that the words, "Largest net sale,"

should never be omitted from under the title. Accordingly, when the Dreadnought bill appeared, this is how it read :



The *Star* bills were generally good, as I have already pointed out. On a heat storm being followed by a shower of hail, the following intriguing bill was put out :



During the latter part of the War, when newspaper placards were stopped owing to the shortage of paper, news-sellers were in the habit of using slates to announce the day's leading news-feature. The day before the Armistice, the newsvendor at

Golder's Green tube station, who had the true journalistic instinct, came out with this catchy, selling announcement on his slate :

***Big  
&  
Little Willie  
'Op  
It.***

For point, terseness and selling value, that wording required a lot of beating.

A whole book could be devoted to clever or tricky head-lines, from "Jerked to Jesus," used by an American sub-editor to describe a lynching tragedy, to "Women and Whine," used by myself to describe a woman's Court application about a lost dog.

There was an Irish sub on the *Daily Mail* named O'Donnell, who was an apt hand at headlines. When at the conclusion of hostilities with America in 1898, Spain, after being horrified by the U.S. offer of twenty million dollars compensation for her wrested property rights in the Philippines, decided to sink her pride and accept the money, he produced the head-line : "Spain pockets the insult." For the funeral of the murdered Serbian royalties, when the assassins rode in the procession, his head-line was, "Bodyguard of Mounted Assassins."

. . . . .

As Editor of the *Sunday Dispatch* I always found any letter from Bernard Shaw admirable "copy." One that he sent us was a humorous denial of the rumour that he had been "stung by a wasp." In another he advised, *apropos* the mysterious medical contraption known as Abram's magic box, that a dispassionate interpretation of the radio-activity of candidates' blood should

form part of their qualification at election time. Samples of the blood of Jix<sup>1</sup> and Lord Hugh Cecil might show whether there was any difference in their rays corresponding to their differences about the Book of Common Prayer. We headed the letter, "G.B.S. after Jix's blood!"

A characteristic interview with Shaw could always be regarded as adding to the liveliness of your newspaper columns, even if the views expressed were exasperating, or did violence to your own ideas and sentiments. We were fortunate in our *Sunday Dispatch* interviews with him. They invariably made piquant reading. After thirty years in London journalism it is not surprising that I should have much to say about Bernard Shaw, but, as it is all of a laudable character, I am deterred by the fact that it may cause him embarrassment. Generous praise of his qualities is apt to lead thoughtless people into abusing his kindness. That he has worries enough, without my adding to their number, can be gleaned from the appended printed post card, which in sheer self-defence he has been compelled to send out.

Please do not ask Mr. Bernard Shaw for money. He has not enough to help the large number of his readers who are in urgent need of it. He can write for you : he cannot finance you.

4 Whitehall Court, London, S.W.1.

Dare I tell Mr. Shaw that three-quarters of his troubles are due to the inability of the public to believe that anything he says or does can be devoid of humorous significance, so accustomed are we to having our leg pulled by him ?

In dealing with the excitable and much-misunderstood novelist, D. H. Lawrence, my difficulty, as he readily perceived, was to keep from his contributions matter that would upset our readers. Had there been only myself to study, his sex theories would not have worried me in the slightest, but the people who read a big popular Sunday paper are of all ages and susceptibilities, and one tries to avoid giving unnecessary offence to any large section.

<sup>1</sup> Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary responsible for the raid on the Arcos (Soviet) headquarters in London.

Explaining his own difficulties he wrote: "I sent Miss Pearn (the accomplished representative of Messrs. Curtis Brown, the literary agents, who has since left them) an article yesterday to show you, putting 'very delicately' on tiptoe like Agag, my position with regard to my naughty book (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*). If it's not suitable I don't mind at all. I really don't know much about the Sunday morning public, or any other.

"But I'd rather write for the *Sunday Dispatch* than for the high-brow papers and magazines. Though the thought of the godless Sabbath public makes one shiver a bit, I still believe it has more spunk than the 'refined' public. It comes back with some sort of response, even if it gives one goose-flesh! . . ."

He added that he had begun to receive letters from boys whom he went to school with thirty years ago, and had never heard of since—"They pat me half approvingly, half reprovngly on the back, and, luckily, can't see me bristle!"

I asked Lawrence to accept a fine black and white drawing of himself done by that splendid artist, Joe Simpson, but he implored me not to give it to him, "It will only worry me. I hate photographs and things of myself which are never *me*, and I wonder all the more who it can be. Look at this passport photograph I had taken two days ago—some sweet fellow with a black beard which I haven't got. But do thank Mr. Simpson for not making me Satanic for once. Even his tragic brow that he gave me was better than the smirking Satanismus I am so used to . . ."

. . . . .

In my notebooks I came across a witty line suggesting that Pinero and Jerome, at one time or other, had had a tiff. It ran "while Pinero fiddled Jerome burned." I thought an article bristling with epigrams would make admirable reading, and in my innocence and enthusiasm I wrote to Somerset Maugham for a contribution to contain no less than ten epigrams. He wrote back, "If I had ten new epigrams I would write a play!"

Often the best articles we printed came from the most reluctant people. It was extremely difficult to persuade the late Lord Inchcape, the great shipping magnate, to write even on his own pet subject, National Economy. A reference of mine to his hatred of publicity appears to have greatly touched him, for I received from him a letter in which he reiterated his dislike of publicity, and made it clear that he had received more advertisement than he ever wanted.

From the late Lord Melchett it was less difficult to entice

an article. Even at the height of his affluence, he demanded adequate remuneration for his literary work. His argument, I fancy, was that if his views were worth seeking, they were worth paying for, and that the matter of his own wealth did not enter into the question.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### HOW CASTLEROSSE "ARRIVED"

WHEN I had completed thirteen years as Editor of the *Sunday Dispatch*, there came a distinct break in my life. I passed on to the *Daily Mail* as a special writer, occasionally helping with the leading articles. Shaped to a simpler and less arduous pattern, my days were now refreshingly free from worry and responsibility, a kind of semi-holiday compared with what I had gone through. All I required to complete my happiness was the ability to persuade the literary editor, Robert Prew, a most excellent fellow in every respect, that my articles deserved to run over his allotted space.

On hearing the news that I had left the *Dispatch*, John Gordon, the Editor of the *Sunday Express*, an old *Evening News* friend, wrote me a charming letter, hoping that I would find my new form of existence agreeable. Sunday paper editors can be keen rivals and still wish one another well. This was certainly the case with us. Once, when we found we had bought the same set of articles, instead of quarrelling as others might have done, we proceeded to divide them up, like sensible men. Memories in common made us kind to one another. We had both "chief-subbed" on the *Evening News* under the quiet W. J. Evans, who was so excellent a mentor. What had been for Gordon a regular job, had been for me occasional duty. Years ago, for one Saturday afternoon at least, Gordon worked for the *Dispatch* as a substitute sub-editor on 'J. J. Brebner's<sup>1</sup> sporting staff. Since then his career has been to march from one success to another. A colleague has said of him that, like Cato, he is firm; like Aristides, just; but, unlike Cincinnatus, not "nobly poor," since in the hope one day of retiring to a beautiful house with a beautiful garden, he has been steadily saving his money. I would not for the world spoil Gordon's dream, but my experience of Sunday paper editors is that they all start with visions of lovely gardens which shall solace their declining years, and finish up very much like myself

<sup>1</sup> Since retired.

in a flat in stony Victoria, where the nearest approach to having a garden is to sit in St. James's Park. Nourishing more grandiose hopes than Gordon, I had originally in mind, not merely a fringed plot, but a compact, well-stocked farm set by a lake in Devonshire. No wonder my family thought me crazy.

It was to Gordon that I owed my first introduction to the colourful Lord Castlerosse. He wrote that the genial gossip was curious to know what kind of a fellow I was. Would I come to lunch and let his lordly eye sample me? On one of these festive occasions at the Savoy there passed our table a quiet, little, sandy-haired man, who sat himself in a lonely seat at the end of the room. Castlerosse turned to me and said: "Do you know who that is?"—"No."—"That's J. S. Elias who runs the *Daily Herald*." How strange that, for all my gadding about, I had never before seen this remarkable man whose one amusement, I had often been told, was work—a Northcliffe attribute extending even to the hours he kept—at the office before ten o'clock in the morning, with no relaxation until the headlines on the front page of the *Herald* have been read to him over the telephone, which often means keeping at it until midnight. Before the advent of Elias, I did not think in the greed for work there could ever be another like my old Chief.

To hear the story of Castlerosse's début in Fleet Street, as he related it to me over the coffee-cups, is better amusement than any pantomime. The great pity is that one cannot hope to transfer to cold print its essential flavour, or translate to lifeless paper an adequate sense of the exuberant mirth which accompanies the recital. The facial expression of the man, the movements of his hands, the subdued chuckle with punctuates each sentence—all must be taken for granted in my restrained narrative of the notable Hegira from Stock Exchange to Journalism. Castlerosse, as I remember his conveyed history, began life as a dealer in "shorts"—short-dated, gilt-edged securities—and when he chose to work (these are his own words) he prospered. Always friendly with Lord Beaverbrook, who, like Lloyd George, ever yearns for sympathetic companionship, he accompanied the Chief Proprietor of the *Daily Express* to Monte Carlo. To give himself something to do, for he has a restless brain, Lord Beaverbrook sat down and wrote an article on the Casino, and as he writes exceedingly well we may assume that the composition had, as usual, considerable merit. The article being finished, he handed it over to Castlerosse for his approval. "Good," was the other's mild comment, "Quite good, but of course, not



nearly so good as the article I should write." "Well, try your hand," remarked Lord Beaverbrook, not a whit put out. According to Castlerosse the effort he evolved and in due course sent to the *Express*, was a masterpiece of magnificent English, every sentence having its pearl of wisdom; the whole a piece of glittering, literary embroidery.

The sub-editors who received the article looked at the signature, saw that it did not spell "Beaverbrook," and immediately reduced the masterpiece to forty lines.

Thanks to his extensive reading, Lord Castlerosse was aware that even greater men had been subjected to similar indignities, and with the philosophic calm of his noble line he refused to be perturbed by this "dusty answer to the soul." He waited his opportunity. It came when the *Daily Express* asked him to report a boxing match. His account went in just as he had written it. He could claim, then, to have made good on his own merits. Later he was tried at gossip paragraphs, and, when the *Express* people were satisfied that he had the right material in him, they persuaded him to sign the feature. That is how Viscount Castlerosse, gossip-writer, was started on his career of fame in Fleet Street. To-day he must be among the highest-paid journalists in London, though he assured me that, to begin with, he did not receive more than £10 per week.

The genial gossipier is better known for his wit than for his pathos; yet the story he wrote of the ex-servicemen's visit to Ypres so worked on the feelings of a normally matter-of-fact sub-editor as to rouse substantial fears of the matter missing the edition. Sub-editors, I may say, have wept over my stuff, but for different reasons.

At first Castlerosse shared quarters with A. J. Russell, one-time manager of the *Sunday Express*. A ferocious row, as though the building were being pulled down, drove Gordon, the Editor, in great haste to this room. He found Castlerosse very red in the face, perspiration pouring out of every pore, busily engaged in overturning desks, tables and chairs, lifting up carpets, poking out the fire, and dragging the chimney, all to the complete bewilderment of his room-mate, the grave and religious-minded Russell. An adequate explanation was quickly forthcoming. *Castlerosse had mislaid his pipe.*

Bill Needham, the advertising manager of the *Sunday Express*, was sitting in the Savoy lounge doing his best to persuade an advertiser to take a page, when the latter's eye was attracted by

the sight of a sumptuous Rolls-Royce, into which, after gracefully acknowledging the reverential bows of numerous menials who were being richly rewarded, there stepped a lord of creation, attired in a magnificent fur-lined overcoat with a sable collar, and smoking a cigar that reached to his knees.

"Who on earth is that?" exclaimed the advertiser in awe-struck tones. "That?" answered Needham, offhandedly. "You mean that fellow getting into the Rolls-Royce? Oh, just one of our reporters." It was Castlerosse, who having lunched, was on his way back to Shoe Lane. Needham got his page.

Castlerosse comes at the end of thirty years' memories of the *Express* office. In my *Evening News* reporting days, Fleet Street never knew what the audacious fellows on the *Express* would do next. When the Druce exhumation took place, it was whispered that a reporter from Shoe Lane had slept all night in the cemetery. Covered with leaves, like the babes in the wood, he had been discovered by one of the keepers, and, despite vigorous protests, kicked out.

It was no uncommon thing for the *Express* reporting staff, when planning their big news-raids, to hire a special room in De Keyser's Hotel on the Embankment. The only explanation I ever heard was that their own office did not allow the necessary elbow room. They and the *Star* men were the last of the bohemians. Still faithful to the old traditions is the prankish J. B. Morton, reputed between each of his paragraphs for "Beachcomber's" column to dance with joy, like the Israelites of yore. He has long held the theory that bell-pushes in newspaper offices are not made to act. Though he has pressed them regularly for ten years, he swears that no copy-boy has answered his summons since the year 1926.

. . . . .

Had Lord Beaverbrook exercised his option on the *Evening Times*, I should have been on his staff, and my course in Fleet Street would undoubtedly have taken a very different turn. A small service which the *Dispatch* rendered him in May, 1930, brought me a characteristic note, concluding, "You treat me with generous kindness and I am sure you know that I am grateful." Whatever I did was, of course, with the authority of Lord Rothermere, but even the fact that Lord Beaverbrook would know this, did not prevent him from thanking me.

Lord Beaverbrook has a pretty wit. "The three most

interesting things in life," he once said, "are women, wine and money, but you must not mix them."

On meeting a funeral procession in Fleet Street, he remarked: "There goes the *News-Editor* of the *Morning Bugle*." I have suppressed the real name, but the reference was to a paper not conspicuous at the time for the liveliness or up-to-dateness of its news-department. On the other hand Lord Beaverbrook has inspired equal wit in others, as, for instance, the *bon mot* of the novelist, who declared that he had had a dream of Heaven in which the Almighty was seen reading Lord Beaverbrook's book on *Success*!

Lord Beaverbrook is imbued with a deep religious sense, and there was a period when he attended every one of Gipsy Smith's Evangelical meetings. After dinner, accompanied by Lloyd George, he has been known to spend an hour or more listening to the Salvation Army singers. Once he warned his staff to do nothing contrary to the spirit of the Westminster "Confession," though more than a few of the people in Shoe Lane must have been puzzled to know what he meant. As I do not wish to sail under false colours, I will frankly admit that I had to consult the Library of Church House, Westminster, to find out that the Westminster Confession of Faith, drawn up in 1643, is the adjusted expression of the living beliefs of the Church of Scotland whose constitution is Presbyterian.

While Lord Northcliffe was actuated by the most friendly feelings towards Lord Beaverbrook, and would never suffer anybody in the *Daily Mail* business to criticise him unfairly, he saw no reason why his *communiqués* should not speak the truth about the *Daily Express*. Thus, under the date, May 17th, 1919, he wrote:—

"The *Daily Express* is a lively paper this morning, and if it were not a perennial imitator, it would be a formidable competitor, though during most of the week it has been a very bad paper."

It might be interesting and profitable for the members of the *Express* staff to look up their files for May, 1919, and see how far they are prepared to agree with Lord Northcliffe's remarks.

Lord Beaverbrook was greatly intrigued by the personality of the Chief. At a dinner gathering that included Swaffer,<sup>1</sup> then on his staff, Lord Beaverbrook wanted to give a shilling as a tip to one of the attendants, but found he had no loose money,

<sup>1</sup> Hannen Swaffer is now writer for the group of papers controlled by Mr. J. S. Elias of the *Daily Herald*.

and so had to borrow a coin from Lady Beaverbrook: "That's just one of the ways in which you resemble Lord Northcliffe," remarked Swaffer. "And what are the other ways?" asked Lord Beaverbrook, his curiosity provoked. "Some other time I will tell you," was the evasive answer, but that time never came.

Beverley Baxter, formerly Editor of the *Daily Express*, began life as a business man — "a romanticist selling pianos," he has described himself to me. Since perseverance, adroitness, and pushful methods were elements in his success, we are furnished in that phase of his career with early proof of the forceful qualities which, when he took to journalism, were to carry him to the top of the tree. He was asked one day whether he thought his editorship had contributed to the advance of the *Daily Express*. His diplomatic reply was, "At least my editorship has not prevented its growth."

Here are two of Baxter's best stories in his own phraseology. "There was a day when Lord Beaverbrook wished to see me at five o'clock. 'Alas, I shall be unable to come,' I apologetically explained. 'At five o'clock I have an appointment with the Prime Minister.' 'Promise me you won't patronise him,' advised Lord Beaverbrook, 'I don't mind you patronising me, for, after all, I am but the grandson of a humble farm-labourer; *the Prime Minister is the Prime Minister.*'"

— — —

"We were having dinner in a select company of dukes, marquises and belted earls. 'You know, Baxter,' remarked Lord Beaverbrook, 'these people, for all their titles, are not important now. It is the descendants of humble people, such as our two selves, who have the say to-day.'

"'Excuse me, Lord Beaverbrook,' was my reply, 'I don't like you describing my ancestry as humble. My grandfather was an alderman.'"

R. D. B. Blumenfeld, who was Editor-in-chief of the *Express* for so many years, crossed over from the *Daily Mail*, where he had the reputation of being the highest paid news-editor in Britain, though his functions could scarcely be said to be confined to any one department. He invented the name, "Tuppenny Tube," for the Central London Railway that then ran from the Bank to Shepherd's Bush. Extremely clever at headlines he thought them out sitting in his shirt sleeves, whose broad American stripes are still remembered in Carmelite House. Like Warden, for some

time Managing Editor of the *Daily Mail*, R. D. B. had his strenuous passages with Gordon Bennett. The possessor of a fine moustache of which he was justifiably proud, he was invited to the Commodore's yacht, to find the guests, with the sole exception of himself, clean-shaven. The eccentric Gordon Bennett pressed him to follow suit, but Blumenfeld refused to sacrifice his moustache, and there was the devil of a row.

Ewart Hodgson, for some years the eminently readable dramatic critic of the *Daily Express*—he used to serve the *Dispatch* in the same capacity—has the justifiable reputation of being one of the best raconteurs in Fleet Street. Whether he is talking of newspaper men, theatrical people, or film stars, he has always an apt story to make his conversation entertaining. It will be a change for him to hear a story about himself :—

He and Arthur Christiansen, the able young Editor of the *Daily Express*, visited Cracow together, and during a round of sight-seeing stopped at the doors of the ancient Ghetto synagogue. As they were without the necessary head-covering, they were turned away by the zealous beadle. Not to be beaten, they borrowed the bright yellow and red berets of their respective wives. Though the astonished greybeard at the door almost fainted at being challenged by men so strangely attired, yet, as they were wearing hats, he had no alternative but to let them pass. It was the first time in two hundred years that a male had ever sat in that synagogue wearing a woman's beret !

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A *Daily Express* reporter, surveying from the opposite side of Fleet Street the new building, that fascinating monument in ebony, shook his head doubtfully, and remarked, " Like the story we printed the other day, magnificent, but not quite true."

## CHAPTER XXX

### "CLOSE-UPS" OF POLITICIANS

DURING the 1931 General Election which was to see the rout of the Socialist wastrels, I was invited to lend a hand to the *Daily Mail*, whose political policy in the absence of Lord Rothermere was being skilfully directed by Mr. Esmond Harmsworth. Among other tasks, at his request, I did a job of reporting. I chased the weary and harassed Prime Minister<sup>1</sup> round the country, to secure an article which he had promised as a sort of wind-up to the *Daily Mail's* energetic campaign on behalf of the National Government. I located him somewhere near Tamworth, and I shall never forget the distressed look on his face when I announced my mission to him. That look, in words of burning eloquence, seemed to plead, "Have I not enough cares on my shoulders without having to sit down and write a newspaper article?" Had I consulted my own personal inclinations, I should have taken pity on Ramsay MacDonald's overburdened state, and, accepting my errand as having failed, taken the first train back to London. I did nothing of the sort. What right have journalists to indulge in the luxury of placating their own feelings? Always their paper should come first. Besides, the Prime Minister had promised the article and should keep his word. So, declining to be rebuffed by Mr. MacDonald's very human irritation, I stood my ground. I will say this for the Premier that, once I got him started, the sentences flowed from his brain on to my book in an uninterrupted torrent. He completed the dictation in what must have been record time. I noticed that one of his companions on his electioneering round was Sir Alec Martin, picture expert and partner of Christie's, whose advice is generally supposed to inspire the ex-Prime Minister's modest art purchases.

When Mr. MacDonald was recovering from the operation on his eye, he was visited by the King, who thoughtfully asked how long

<sup>1</sup> Since those days Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has resigned the Premiership to Mr. Baldwin, taking instead the office of Lord President of the Council.

he might stay. On being told "half an hour," he specially requested to be advised when his time was up. The story goes that, exactly to the minute, there came a knock at the door of Mr. MacDonald's room, followed by the entrance of one of the doctors, who, bowing low, gravely sang out to the intense amusement of both the King and the patient, "Time please, your Majesty!"

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This election meeting with Ramsay MacDonald was the last of my journalistic encounters with the politicians. Out of my thirty years' impressions of Downing St., Lloyd George easily emerges as the most picturesque and, from the point of view of copy, the most satisfying of all the statesmen I have met. Since Disraeli, no outstanding personality on the political stage has arrested the imagination of Fleet Street to the same extent as the Welsh wizard, whose versatility, brilliant coups, dislike for conventional methods of diplomacy and breezy cheerfulness have made him a splendid subject for the pen of the reporter and descriptive writer. Quite early I discovered that where Lloyd George scored over other politicians was in having an unlimited capacity for work, for which he had to thank his extraordinary powers of physical endurance and his admirable nerves. Dr. Jowett knew what he was talking about when he told the late Lord Lansdowne, "There is nothing so important to a statesman as the condition of his nerves." One can imagine the strain of being Prime Minister during the War—the endless calls on his time, the never-ceasing meetings with Ministers, Generals, public men and the like, yet most mornings, "fit as a fiddle," Ll. G. would be ready at 6 a.m. for the first batch of official papers "vetted" for him over-night. His mental resiliency was simply astounding. I have known him address a rousing meeting, and, while listening to the vote of thanks, discuss with Sir William Sutherland, his faithful henchman, the latest dispatches from the Front. While mechanically shaking hands with scores of enthusiastic admirers, I have heard him give that same admirable lieutenant instructions on seven or eight different issues of vital importance. When he had to telephone from Paris during the War, Lloyd George would occasionally speak in Welsh, by way of extra precaution.

Balfour, who was not a bad judge of character, proclaimed Lloyd George's two most shining assets to be, his wide humanity and his disciplined brain. The latter he compared to a piece of

well-oiled machinery that could be applied at any given moment to a different use. Bonar Law considered Lloyd George's indomitable spirit and optimism to be the most laudable traits in his disposition, and, during the gloomy Passchendaele period, went about saying, "That little man sees a ray of sunshine everywhere." My own feeling, shared, I believe, by that acute student of human nature, Mr. J. M. Keynes, is that Lloyd George possesses a sixth sense which most times, though not always, enables him to scent danger unsuspected by anybody else. Thus, during the passage of the Insurance Act, he was frequently too rushed to have the opportunity to prime himself with the notes prepared by Sutherland, but his sure instinct allowed him to avoid the pitfalls in the trickiest and most artfully disguised of the Opposition amendments. The effect of some of these proposals would have been to jeopardise the whole intention of the Act.

In the Haig controversy, the belief that Lord Northcliffe's championship of the Field-Marshal prevented Lloyd George from effecting a change in the High Command is largely myth. It is true that, both in Lord Northcliffe and the Conservative Party, the General found strong supporters, but the real reason why Lloyd George hesitated to change Haig was that he saw no one better available. Had there been an obvious substitute, I do not think that all the opposition in the world would have stopped Lloyd George from making the switch-over.

After the War I came to the definite conclusion that Lloyd George was tired, and could no longer do himself full justice. Otherwise he would never have forgotten the advice given to him, in 1918, by Clemenceau, shrewdest of politicians, "Don't make the mistake, George, of having a party." As everybody knows, Lloyd George was moving in the direction of a Centre Party when Baldwin came along to upset his apple-cart.

A thoroughly fresh Lloyd George would not, early on, have underrated the powers of Baldwin, and accepted his apparently naïve and rare utterances in the Coalition Cabinet as proof of the complete absence of ambition. That passion may hide itself under many guises.

What a difference it would have made in the post-War era, had Lloyd George altered three of his courses! (1) If, refusing to have his time monopolised abroad by various international conferences, he had stayed at home, and concentrated on Economy as the main issue of the day. (2) If, insensitive to the charm and sympathetic manner of Sir Robert Horne, he had made Baldwin Chancellor and the other President of the Board of Trade. (3) If, slowing down social welfare measures which the country



could not afford, he had convinced the alarmed Tory caucuses that he was not, as they feared, simply a Liberal statesman using Tory votes to push through Radical legislation.

The effect of the first course was to take his mind off the Home political Front, always a tremendous risk for a politician uneasily seated in power, i.e. dependent on an unstable following, and at the same time to rob him of the rallying cry which he had found so useful throughout his exciting career. The effect of the second course was to intensify the implicit antagonism between himself and Baldwin. The effect of the third course was to justify Baldwin's overthrow of the Coalition, since he knew he had the Tory rank and file behind him.

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For none of his Ministerial colleagues was Lloyd George understood to have higher admiration than for Winston Churchill, whose genius he readily acknowledged. When Baldwin appointed Churchill Chancellor of the Exchequer, obviously with the idea of strengthening his front bench debating power, Ll. G. is said to have remarked, "It is the only good and novel thing Baldwin has done."

In 1924, Lloyd George was a guest at a lunch given by Mrs. Asquith, when the conversation turned on Churchill. Were he still a solicitor, declared Ll. G., and Winston a barrister, he would brief him to prevent the other side getting him. Asquith, on his part, said he would brief Winston for the sheer value of his services to his side.

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To Sir William Sutherland, so prominently linked up with Lloyd George at the height of his power, many journalists owe a debt of gratitude which partisan feeling should not allow them to forget. In any difficulty a puzzled newspaper man could consult him, and, provided the questions were suitable, be sure of receiving enlightenment. With so many bewildering and mutually contradictory statements pouring in from Allied and neutral capitals, it was a cause for thankfulness that journalists could always find in Sutherland a sympathetic and reliable guide.

Though he was a vigorous guardian of his Chief's interests, and whenever those interests were challenged ready to prove himself a hard hitter, he should be given credit for many forms of service that had nothing to do with championship of Lloyd George. In particular I have in mind the innumerable occasions when he

smoothed down exacerbated feelings, and pacified aggrieved personalities who brought their troubles to Downing Street.

Bonar Law, who allowed himself to be overshadowed both by Asquith and Lloyd George, was essentially a shy and nervous man, with a sad expression on his face which made journalists feel genuinely sorry for him. One Saturday morning in the third year of the War, I stepped through the folding doors separating No. 11 from No. 10 Downing Street, to see him. As our conversation took an unexpectedly intimate turn, I ventured to ask him why he looked so melancholy, and was always being photographed and caricatured as looking in the last stages of depression. He replied that he neither felt nor was conscious of looking melancholy. The smile that came into his face while he was speaking revealed quite a different Bonar Law to me. But soon he changed back to his familiar expression, to become once more the forlorn statesman of popular legend. The explanation was to be found in the pressure of private sorrows, and the knowledge that from a health point of view he was a doomed man. Had he lived, I feel sure that he would have risen high in popular estimation, for the 1922 phrase, "Honest to the verge of simplicity," which had been applied to him, had caught the national imagination. Tired of the political spell-binders, people more and more were inclined to say, "That's the very man we want."

The best story to tell of Baldwin would be a verbatim repetition of his amusing conversation with Balfour over Epstein's much-discussed "Rima" in Hyde Park, together with the comments of the Apostle of Philosophic Doubt after a special visit of inspection to the statue. Since those discreet members of the profession, the Lobby correspondents, to whom Baldwin unburdened himself, have not thought fit to publish his speech, it would be impertinence on my part to usurp their functions. But all who have any influence with the Tory leader should induce him to recite the story for their benefit. I guarantee them a hearty laugh.

To the enormous anecdotage gathering round the strange personality of the Marquis Curzon ought to be added his passage-at-arms with the former Soviet Foreign Minister. "The Chicherins," the Russian told the abashed Marquis, "come from an older and finer family than yours." This boastful reference to the antiquity and quality of one of the most aristocratic

of Russian clans goes to show that not all Bolsheviks are free from pride of race. I have been told by more than one person that had Curzon been sent as Ambassador to Moscow, he would have done well. His very superiority of manner would have proved a magnificent asset !

No journalist can be long in the presence of Winston Churchill without being conscious of his impressive personality. When he was living in Sussex Square, I had occasion to pay him a business visit. He showed me some of his newer art experiments, and we talked about pictures generally. During the War nothing had astonished him more, he remarked, than the way in which works of art stood up to the cataclysm. "Art remains when everything else crumbles," was his apt summing-up. How true ! Who can imagine a time when a Rembrandt or a Raphael will not be eagerly wanted ?

We spoke of St. Beuve's "Causeries du lundi," and I was interested to find that Mr. Churchill shared my opinion of their merits. There cropped up the name of a Continental Queen who has a lovely daughter. He thought it was highly necessary that princesses should be beautiful. The public preferred them to be beautiful before all else.

While resting from political office, Mr. Churchill must often wonder what reward he has received from serving the State. I remember him once saying to me, "Sometimes I much prefer to play polo and live peacefully in the country, earning a good living out of my writing ; instead of being cooped up every afternoon in the stuffy House of Commons. Not that I should not like to control the affairs of the nation," he added wistfully. I suggested with his temperament he could not be happy long out of active political life. He thought for a moment and agreed that I was right. "The passion for politics," he said, "is a disease—just like being at the Court of Louis XV. You were unhappy when you were there, and unhappy when you were away."

When Mr. Churchill was writing for the *Dispatch*, one of his articles was unnecessarily long in coming to the point. I recommended him to rewrite the beginning. To my surprise he was annoyed. "Had he better not stop the series ?" he asked. I appealed to his reason and sense of fairness, and as I anticipated not in vain. He agreed to do as I asked, and even went so far as to tell me that my criticism of the article was quite justified. I had done him a service in being so honest with him.

Our arrangement with Mr. Churchill was that he should not

work for another Sunday paper, but as Lord Camrose particularly desired him to write an article on Lord Birkenhead for the *Sunday Times*, we waived the condition, Lord Rothermere naturally raising no objection. Later I was amused to hear that Lord Camrose and Winston had tossed up, £300 or nothing, for the article. Who won I never succeeded in finding out.

For the Churchill story which follows I am indebted to a Radical politician: While campaigning in Edinburgh with Sir Robert Horne in the 1924 election, Winston accepted the hospitality of (the late) Lord Rosebery. One of the ladies of the party remarked to the host, "I am sure Winston will be the leader of the Conservative Party," to which the venerable statesman replied, "Do you think I am in my dotage?" Yet remembering that during the period 1924-9 he was to be Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer, are we not justified in assuming that his chances of being Conservative leader were far from being as remote as Lord Rosebery imagined?

To the Carson anecdotes I have but one contribution to make: People were discussing a *cause célèbre* which had filled columns in the newspapers, the central figure being an adventurous married lady. A famous King's Counsel remarked that, if the husband had gone into the box, and Lord Carson had been cross-examining, he would have begun in this fashion:

You have a pretty wife, Mr. Johnson.

—Yes.

*Have you any other form of livelihood?*

From my earliest days in London I had the usual Fleet Street acquaintanceship with T. P. O'Connor, but the knowledge that we were brother journalists prevented me from exploiting him. Dog does not eat dog. Towards the end of his life Tay Pay grew morose and forlorn, tormented by the thought of his great age, the fear of approaching death and the break-up of most of his political aspirations. On returning from America, he found the second Coalition had passed conscription for Ireland. He was asked whether he had been to see a particular Minister, generally supposed to be his friend. He replied oracularly:—

"If you are invited to dine with a man who has taken somebody else's wife you have some sense of moral reputation, but you go; when he has taken your own wife, you don't go at all."

In Tay Pay's opinion conscription for Ireland meant the death of the Nationalist Party, which could no longer oppose Sinn Féin with the claim that it had kept compulsory military service from crossing St. George's Channel.

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My most vivid memory of Balfour relates to the period of the Dogger Bank crisis—the autumn of 1904—when as a result of the frenzied attacks made on British trawlers by Rodjestvensky's Mad Dog Fleet,<sup>1</sup> we were in some danger of going to war with Russia. At the height of the tension the door of No. 10 suddenly opened, and like a man in a dream, hatless and overcoatless, out stepped Balfour, head upturned to the cool, evening sky in the traditional manner of the philosopher. Followed by many curious eyes, he walked as far as the Horse Guards and back.

Mostly one saw Balfour alone, creeping softly along the streets in his low-heeled shoes. During the War period, if he happened to be out of doors while an air raid was in progress, he remained quite unperturbed. He was wholly insensible to the inquisitive gaze of passers-by. To illustrate his extraordinary power of detachment from the vulgarities of everyday life, even a motor-car crash in Pall Mall under his very eyes failed to arrest for a single second his progress towards the Travellers' Club. His most characteristic remark, showing a deep sense of fatalism, was made to the daughter of a Liberal statesman. On being informed of a particular Lloyd George appointment, he said, "Ah! I had always hoped it could be avoided."

"Arthur Balfour has always been in the way," were the words in which the closest friend of Curzon epitomised the secret of the tragedy of the lost Premiership.<sup>2</sup>

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When Asquith was superseded by Lloyd George, he had no illusions about the extent of his fall. "We shall be out a very long time," he told his supporters. Even then he was an optimist.

During an important Liberal Party Conference, the representatives of the Press were kept cooling their heels for over an hour while a supposed *communiqué* was being drafted. An unusually impatient journalist, wondering what the delay was about, popped

<sup>1</sup> The Russian Admiral conceived the crazy idea that Japanese torpedo craft were using the English fishing boats as a screen to their operations.

<sup>2</sup> On the ground that it would not do to have the Premier in the House of Lords, Mr. Baldwin was appointed successor to Mr. Bonar Law, instead of the Marquis Curzon, who had been awaiting the call.

his head in to find Asquith and Sir John Simon engaged in an animated discussion over the right Greek word in an epigram.

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C. B. (Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman) had a liking for the light reading provided by the newest French novels, and I would often meet him in the Continental shops in the West End, browsing among the yellow-backed publications.

## CHAPTER XXXI

GORDON BENNETT AND HEARST

ONE advantage of being on the *Daily Mail* was that, between times, I could listen to the engaging anecdotes of W. L. Warden, the then managing-Editor. His yarns ranged from working memories of *Galignani's Messenger*, the notable journal that gave the news to the Continental English, to intimate glimpses of Gordon Bennett, of whose *New York Herald* Paris Edition he was once acting-Editor. I thought I knew a great deal about Gordon Bennett myself, but Warden's sympathetic realism put my own impressions in the shade. Listening to him I could visualise, as in life, the eccentric Commodore, whom I often saw stepping out of his house in the Champs-Élysées, a favourite Pekingese dog by his side, and in his face that unforgettable, quizzing look which seemed to ask, "And who the devil are you?" The real, as distinct from the glorified, Gordon Bennett breaks out in these anecdotes.

Imagine Warden talking :—

"When the Portuguese had assassinated Manuel's father, I was sent to Lisbon to keep the *Herald* abreast of the news. One eye I kept on the capital where the major developments were occurring; the other on Hendaye on the Franco-Spanish frontier, where the conspiracies were being hatched. My instructions were to stay a month, and on my way back, call at Hendaye for orders. From Hendaye it is a train journey of twelve hours to Paris, so I thought I would give the place a miss, and go straight on to Paris, which I duly reached at 9 a.m. Without waiting to tidy up, I rushed off to 104 Avenue des Champs-Élysées where the Commodore had his fine establishment. In the hall I was met by a secretary, who had a pitying look on his face. 'Look out, Warden,' he said. 'You are for the high-jump.' I moved into the presence. The moment the old man clapped eyes on me he shouted, 'Call yourself a journalist! Didn't I tell you to go to Hendaye for orders? You disobeyed me; that, I know, for the simple reason that my telegram to you has not yet been collected.' I bowed my head in contrition. Looking up at the clock I saw it was 10.30 a.m. 'I am ready to return by the 2 p.m. Sud

Express,' I said appealingly—it left on Mondays in the afternoon, instead of, as on other days, at 8 p.m. The Commodore's curt answer was, 'Yes, catch that train, and *this time* wait my instructions.'

"After the long, weary journey back to Hendaye, judge of my feelings on opening the telegram that had been the cause of all the mischief, to read, 'Take a week's holiday!' I stayed not only a week, but a whole month, until recalled by the laconic message, 'Return to Paris, Gordon Bennett.' In that month, with the pretty daughter of the *Hôtelier* as guide, I explored the beautiful Pierre Loti country, spending happy bachelor days among the delightful Basque people. Nearly thirty years afterwards I revisited Hendaye with my wife, and lunched at that very same hotel. I questioned the smiling Boniface about his pretty daughter, only to learn that she had married a French Colonist in Algeria. As we came away my wife's teasing comment was, 'Now I know why you stayed in Hendaye so long!'

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"When his yacht, *Namuna*, was in Norwegian waters, Gordon Bennett said to the pilot who had just come aboard, 'Do you know where all the rocks are?'—'No, sir,' was the polite reply, 'but I know where there ain't any!'

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"I remember the particular night when a thousand-word cablegram from Dr. Cook, who was alleged to have discovered the North Pole, poured into the *Herald* office. Fortunately one of the secretaries was sufficiently acquainted with Bennett's arrangements to warn us to accept the message, and pay at this end the cost of telegraphing; otherwise we should have been tempted to refuse the matter. Pieced together the cable made a good story, but the following day the experts derided the whole thing as a crude "fake." A decisive point in their favour was the temperature; but what they assumed to be signal proof of Cook's mendacity was, in fact, no more than the careless blunder of a sub-editor while following the *Herald* rule that all temperature readings should be printed in Centigrade. He asked a colleague for the formula for translating Fahrenheit into Centigrade, and either did not hear the answer properly, or was wrongly informed. Whichever was the case, the figures which he introduced into Dr. Cook's copy were inaccurate, with the result that Dr. Cook had to bear the *Herald's* sins in addition to his own.

"The Commodore was not in the least put out at seeing the



story branded as a fake. He said, 'It has gone round the world and is the cheapest newspaper scoop I ever bought.' In the circumstances there was little to be gained by bringing the sub-editor's lapse under his notice."

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"Gordon Bennett, like Lord Northcliffe, was a human dynamo, with the same power of prevision. In his early days he visualised the ultimate popularity of cycling, was one of the pioneers of ballooning, and anticipated the advance of heavier-than-air flying. As a man he was sometimes generous, but seldom just. Thus one morning, seated with his pet secretary, Percy Mitchell, he went meticulously through a sheaf of petty-cash accounts from which, at the end of three hours' solid work, he chewed off the equivalent of 7½d. 'You see, my dear Mitchell,' he sagely remarked, 'how necessary it is for me to keep my hands on things!' Then crossing the road, still elated with a morning's work that had yielded him a nett saving of 7½d., he carelessly flung his favourite barber a thousand-franc note as *pourboire*."

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"Although Gordon Bennett drew a loyalty from his subordinates that was beyond reproach, he remained strangely secretive. He never allowed any of his four secretaries to know more than a tithe of what he was doing, with the result that they were forced, in self-defence, discreetly to compare notes. Otherwise it would have been impossible to preserve any kind of order and continuity in the business, and chaos must have ensued. It was this habit of comparing notes which saved the Dr. Cook cable from being thrown into the wastepaper-basket, for only one of the four secretaries knew that the Commodore had contracted for the story."

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"To the day of his death, and long afterwards, an undeserved reputation for tippling adhered to Gordon Bennett. The truth is that he was physically incapable of drinking to excess. Anything more than two or three drinks of any alcoholic beverage put him completely out of business; so much so that for days he would be incapacitated from seeing anybody but his regular private secretary. Such being his disability, the Commodore contented himself with enviously watching other men drink to their hearts' content. He had a tremendous admiration for anybody who without visible effect could take on a load of liquor."

"And now for a good story. The sub-editors of the *Paris Herald* took a drink at night to relieve the tedium of the long watch from 10 p.m. onwards. The sight of the big table spread with every variety of beverage, and interspersed with paste bottles, scissors and writing-pads, might easily have been misunderstood. Consequently the moment Gordon Bennett was spotted, the whole heterogeneous mass of bottles and glasses was pushed through the sliding door that separated this room from the sporting editor's cubicle. There came a night, when, having strolled into the sub-editor's room, the Commodore suddenly remembered that he wanted to discuss a trotting match with the sporting editor. So, accompanied by the jocular Irishman, Mitchell, he went through the sliding door to find Billy Bishop surrounded by the sixty empty glasses that had been hurriedly pushed through to his side of the partition. As he talked, the Commodore surveyed with fascinated eye the dregs of the fearsome banquet, wondering whether the glasses had contained wine or whisky. As soon as he was back in the cool fresh air outside, he turned to his secretary, and in an awe-struck voice remarked, 'Did you see, Mitchell, what that man had drunk? And, Mitchell, did you notice he was still sober, could talk quite coherently, answer my questions most rationally, indeed behave like a man who had had nothing to drink at all. Mitchell,' he finished solemnly, 'a man like that is worth a lot of money to us. *Double his salary.*'"

To these lively reminiscences of Warden, I would like to add one comment. Although for years I have been practically a teetotaler, I have never held the view that a journalist should refuse an occasional drink. A glass of beer or wine may often bring him into convivial surroundings where a good story is to be picked up. It is drinking to excess that has raised my ire. The Saturday afternoon that the General Strike was to be declared, the T.U.C. leaders arranged to meet at the Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street to announce their fatal decision. Being before their time, some of the Labour men went into the *King Lud*, Ludgate Hill, for a drink and a snack. The same idea occurred to Tommy Watson of the Hearst newspapers. As a result of talking to one or two of the T.U.C. leaders, he quickly learnt their plans, and thus, fully an hour in advance of the actual decision being announced at the Memorial Hall, was able to give his papers the news that a General Strike was to be declared.

That is what I call having "a profitable drink."

Whereas I never had occasion to talk to Gordon Bennett, I did once have a brief session with William Randolph Hearst. It

happened when I was a reporter on the London *Evening News*. There came to the office a mysterious message that Mr. Hearst had arrived in London, and had something important to say. I drifted along to his hotel, found the great newspaperman pleasant and anecdotal, but as there was nothing in the snappy conversation to warrant the *Evening News* presses being stopped, I was left wondering whether his arrival was in itself to be taken as the promised big news. In America a visitor of his importance would have had all the reporters flocking round him. Here we are not nearly so enterprising. Possibly previous experience had taught Mr. Hearst a lesson; if he wanted himself properly announced, he must do the job himself.

The suspicion (a nice, gentle word) that Mr. Hearst has not always been too friendly to this country, has generally acted as a damper on the desire of most British journalists to become intimate with him. Lord Northcliffe never warmed to Hearst, and while he always had a friendly word to say for (the late) Adolph Ochs, the proprietor of the *New York Times*, the only American newspaper magnate whom he sincerely admired was Joseph Pulitzer. It was from Pulitzer that he took the idea of getting two men to share each of several important key positions in his business; likewise the idea of having a secretary to read to him. The Chief liked Pulitzer much in the same way as he liked the first Lord Burnham. Both appealed to him as patriarchal characters. Of Hearst he was frankly afraid, believing that the Hearst papers could do this country enormous damage in America. Yet if the sentiments of the American publisher towards Great Britain were often suspect, he had no objection to employing British, especially Irish, journalists. Only latterly did he develop the idea that the "key men" in his business must be of American birth. Otherwise, it was argued, he was prevented from making too good a case against the splendidly edited *New York Times*, which that brilliant Yorkshireman, F. T. Burchall,<sup>1</sup> ran when Carr V. Van Anda, the Editor, had fallen sick. Afterwards Edwin L. James, a real American-born Editor, sat in the chair, and the hundred per cent patriots could sleep peacefully in their beds o'nights.

J. Y. McPeake, an Ulsterman of considerable organising gifts, came from the *Dublin Evening Mail* to take charge of *Nash's Magazine*, which under his able direction was converted into a

<sup>1</sup> For several years past Burchall has been the chief travelling foreign correspondent of the *New York Times*.

big money-maker. Every time I met McPeake he mentioned how much the magazine was making. In the same frank way Hearst confirmed its prosperity on every occasion. While being driven down to his fine castle, St. Donat's, in the Vale of Glamorgan—bought unseen on the strength of an advertisement in an "arty" paper, after failure to secure Leeds Castle—Hearst was asked by Sir Charles Allom, the famous contractor, who was supervising the restoration work, whether *Nash's* kept its head above water. "Not only its own head but mine, too, in this country," was his reply. He meant that he earned enough out of it to pay for his entire antique purchases over here.

Unfortunately for McPeake his health went wrong. Gradually success lost any meaning for him. I think it must have been illness that gave him his mournful look, so different from the contented expression of his former leader writer, Henry Doig, who, with scarcely a penny in the world to call his own, ran about as happy as a sand-boy. Hearst was greatly affected by McPeake's death, and insisted that another Irishman should replace him. Actually the job was offered to an Irish journalist, who having passed his sixtieth year had the good sense to decline it. Then it was that the present editor, clever Alice Head, who while the proprietor was hunting round for McPeake's successor had successfully carried on the magazine, received her well-deserved promotion.

I did a great deal of work for McPeake when he was in Dublin, but, as I often told him, it was a labour of love. On balance I do not think the association ever made me any money.

No journalist who had a nodding acquaintance with the West End, and West-End life generally, dare plead ignorance of the fine suite at the Savoy, used by Hearst as his apartments whenever he visited London. They gave him the fine view of the river he liked, "the grandest in the world," he used to say. As his own residence in Riverside Drive, New York, overlooks the Hudson, one must conclude that Hearst has a partiality for busy river scenes. While standing at the window of his Embankment suite, a favourite recreation of his was to test his memory by identifying the different buildings in the broad perspective.

There is a much-advertised side of Hearst I have never been slow to appreciate—his profound love for cathedrals. As he stepped ashore at Southampton, often his first words have been, "Now let us take another look at Winchester Cathedral." And what more inspiring sight for ocean-keened eyes could there be

than this noble structure? That his passion for antiques, such as old silver, should strangely enough be married to a dislike for high-brow people is understandable, even in one who takes his tone and style from Harvard, and has good Californian blood in his veins. Many clever men prefer commonplace folk of a low-brow humour as company, and we should not blame Hearst for being inclined that way himself. I have sometimes wondered how on the rare occasions when they met he fared with Mr. Balfour. I fear that subtle and intellectualised enigma must have bored him to tears. With the human Lloyd George, Hearst would have been far more in his element.

Whenever Mr. and Mrs. Hearst came to London, usually a queue of art-dealers was waiting to see them. One could well believe that there was a Los Angeles warehouse piled high with crates of art treasures bought by Hearst, and still to be opened, their contents ranging from Elizabethan panelling, raped from some historical mansion, to armour that had hung in a medieval German castle.

Even in the colourful history of Mr. and Mrs. Hearst, it was a great day when in 1922 they lunched with Mr. Lloyd George at 10 Downing Street. The newspapers which chronicled the fact omitted the most entertaining part, which was that Hearst's sons, having commandeered their father's magnificent fleet of cars, compelled him at the last moment to charter a dingy old passing taxicab. Accustomed to doing things in a style appropriate to her dignity, Mrs. Hearst was revolted by the shabbiness of the transport. Wishing to mollify his good lady, Hearst at a convenient moment whispered to a friend, "Tell her that when Viscount Lascelles went courting Princess Mary, he often drove up to Buckingham Palace in an old taxicab." True or not, the story worked. Mrs. Hearst's face was seen to brighten up at once.

Meanwhile a Rolls-Royce having been procured, Mr. and Mrs. Hearst drove suitably that same afternoon to the Hotel Victoria, where they were welcomed by Michael Collins and Arthur Griffiths, both engaged in putting the finishing touches to the Irish Treaty. Collins, as usual, did the talking and greatly impressed Hearst. On the other hand the taciturn Griffiths proved a disappointment, the newspaper magnate mistaking lack of conversational power for lack of ability. Hearst expressed

willingness to support the Treaty, and promised through his newspapers to influence in its favour the important Irish-American element. With that assurance we know that he kept faith.

Hearst's men in America used to tell me that whenever he secured a good "scoop," his face would light up with pleasure, but, on the other hand, that if one were missed, his expression became threatening to the point of explosion. He regarded as one of his worst misses Lindbergh's personal story of his Atlantic Flight, which was first offered to his own people for \$5000, and, on being turned down by them, was bought by the *New York Times*, whose enterprise as we know was handsomely rewarded. I am sure that had Hearst been left to make the decision himself, he would not have been caught napping, for more than once he has proved to be possessed of better judgment than his lieutenants. When he started a new Sunday paper in Texas, the staff said that 10,000 supplements would be enough. He retorted, "Make it a hundred thousand." That was the number they sold.

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Sometimes dislike of taking a little extra trouble has proved awkward in its consequences. There was an occasion when Hearst hurriedly wanted a first-class man for one of his papers. A high executive official was told to go out and get the best journalist available, money not to count. A man who had just linked up with another organisation was found willing to swap over to Hearst. Having regard to the big sum required to buy him off, it was thought wise to consult the Chief before concluding negotiations. "I suggest you see the man first," recommended his lieutenant. "No," was the reply. "You act on your own responsibility." A month later it occurred to Hearst to take a look at the newcomer. He was not impressed and accused his representative of having planted somebody entirely unsuitable on him. The fellow would have to go. "But think of the money we have paid!" protested the aggrieved subordinate. "What does that matter?" was the characteristic reply. "Get somebody else at once." They got out the big cheque book, the evacuated journalist took his money, and with a smile walked across to another newspaper office, to land a job equally as good.

It was in London in 1931 that Hearst drafted his reply to France which had expelled him, an order which was withdrawn. The witty and anecdotal composition showed him to be an accomplished master of polemic.

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W. R. Hearst is the only famous newspaper proprietor known to me who can chew sweets all day. A sweet tooth goes well with the boyish traits in his character.

. . . . .

London journalists always held a high opinion of Arthur Brisbane,<sup>1</sup> long reputed the highest-paid newspaper man in the world. Lord Northcliffe let it be known that there was a man in his employ who drew as much as £30,000 a year, and Lord Rothermere's organisation, I fancy, once owned a journalist who drew even more, but in earning power Brisbane eclipsed them all. He told a friend of mine that in order to gain a single point in an agreement, he consented to forgo a hundred thousand dollars a year in his remuneration. Besides being the wealthiest newspaper writer in the world, he was for many years one of the ten most powerful. It was no uncommon thing for six or seven Congressmen to be waiting to see him, which in America at any rate is real fame. He left a fortune of £5,000,000, a good deal of which was made in real estate speculation in his latter years.

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How disheartening when the keen and hopeful journalistic imagination is baffled by the all-too-dull realities of life and truth ! After long years of imprisonment, a reprieved murderer was let out of the cells and restored to the world. A free-lance blew into the *Daily Mail* office with the suggestion that the man's sweetheart had promised to wait for him until his release ; consequently there should be an affecting reunion—a first-class sob-story. He was told to go ahead with his inquiries, and after a prolonged search traced the whilom sweetheart to Ireland. Unfortunately for his hopes and those of the paper, the young woman, tired of waiting for her convict-lover, had changed her mind, become the wife of somebody else, and was now the mother of six fine grown-up children. Thus what should have been first-class melodrama, proved dull comedy.

When the case of Lieutenant Norman Baillie-Stewart of the Seaforth Highlanders was before the public, a plausible caller at a prominent newspaper office offered to introduce one of the reporters to "Marie Louise," the beautiful German woman, who was said to have played a prominent part in the drama. Putting faith in the man's *bona-fides* the Editor commissioned a shrewd reporter to accompany him to Holland, where "Marie Louise" was understood to be staying. Her hotel was pointed out, but never a sight of her in the flesh. The reporter, naturally

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Brisbane died quite recently.

impatient, was restrained by the promise of an early meeting. Meanwhile "Marie Louise" proved to be temporarily inconvenienced for lack of funds, but even when her wants had been satisfied a regrettable shyness characterised her movements. Throughout the reporter's stay in Holland, she remained invisible. *The whole business was nothing more than a lamentable hoax.*



## CHAPTER XXXII

### WINSTON CHURCHILL OUR BEST STYLIST

**W**HILE an Editor enjoys certain advantages, he has not nearly so nice a life as a writer with an assured position on a leading newspaper, and, money apart, is on the whole decidedly worse off. One must have been the Editor of a large-sale newspaper to appreciate the anxieties and strain of such an onerous job. In my case, delight in escaping from executive duties to the free life of a writer of articles was more than a matter of ridding myself of worry. It was pleasant to feel that, however modestly, I was building round my own name.

Where goodwill is concerned, an Editor leaves off where he begins, but a clever writer whose name is constantly before the public establishes himself as a going concern, and can always command a steady and lucrative income. Generally speaking, this only happens when one is actually a first-class writer. Unless a man is up to standard, his name can appear in a newspaper day after day without any permanent benefit to himself, and he has only to venture outside the narrow orbit of his particular paper to find how disconcertingly true this is. By a first-class writer I mean a man of original views, with the necessary courage to put them forward, and the technical ability to express himself in a felicitous and individual style.

From earliest boyhood I have always had the honourable ambition to write well, but I have never made other than slow progress towards that far-distant goal. It would have been different had I been born with any marked literary aptitude. Any facility in expressing myself had to be patiently and studiously acquired. Constant practice improved my ear; a larger experience of life improved my matter. Hundreds of journalists have benefited in the same way, for only the fortunate few are masters of language and style from the outset.

I have never set too high a value on a perfect style, such as we associate with Flaubert, George Moore or Walter Pater. In their utter perfection, to my mind, resides a lifelessness which must often make the reader sigh for prose less regular.

I can admire the beautifully balanced style and harmonious sentences of Charles Morgan, the accomplished author of *The Fountain*, yet be conscious all the time of being taxed to appreciate to the full such exquisite workmanship. The writing of H. G. Wells is simpler to follow, and has a more human quality, being helped by mannerisms and imperfections from which Morgan's writing is miraculously free. Disregarding his particular prejudices which I find tiresome, one would be inclined to say of Hilaire Belloc that he is in some respects a more consummate artist than either, having a fine sense of antithesis and of the drama of inevitable forces. He does not produce tedium in the reader, and, for my part, I have had great joy in observing his technical mastery, and the skilful way in which he organises his effects.

Writing should be in its period, and carry the stamp, the colour, the genius, the wit, the feeling, and the expression of the age. Judged by this test, Winston Churchill, Ivor Brown, the dramatic critic; Ian Colvin, the leader writer; Desmond MacCarthy, the reviewer; and Herbert Sidebotham, the commentator on public affairs, are notable successes. The style of A. G. Gardiner and J. A. Spender is delightfully smooth and polished, but belongs to an older convention, and for that reason falls short of the qualities which I seek and find in Winston Churchill—sparkle, breadth and a vivid sense of personality.

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The foregoing reflections may sound a little inconsequential, but they are a necessary prelude to the personal confession which follows. Such were my struggles to write passably, that when I was a youth on the *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, and found myself called upon to supply a leader page article, I spent half the night in stringing together the necessary thousand words. Even then I was left with the feeling that what I had written was overloaded with awkward, ill-constructed phrases, and clumsy artifice echoing other people's style. If I had been reading Carlyle or Jean Paul, I would feel like introducing the apostrophe into every fifth paragraph; if I had been studying Gibbon I would feel every sentence needed to be sonorous and a model of brevity like his. Fortunately, J. V. Morton, the Editor of the *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, had a keen sense of style, and wrote well himself. If I grieved to see him prune my work of its excesses, its false ornament and its laboured metaphors, yet I had understanding enough to appreciate the value and wisdom of his revisions. The less pretentious my writing became, the better it read in print. From that day to this I have tried to write simply and in a fashion suited

to my temperament, but rarely have I succeeded. I have a fatal weakness for adjectives, and it is no consolation to me to know that adjectives were created for the express purpose of being used.

The best compliment ever paid me was all the better for being unintentional, "The fault with your articles, Falk," said a colleague, "is that you write as you speak. You use words which belong to commonplace speech, and in a literary article are unseemly." Much to his astonishment, I shook him warmly by the hand, and replied, "Ah, if I could only believe what you say is true!" For what finer writing can there be than that which has the artless complexion of the language of the people—enriched, if you like, by their homely vocabulary and similes?

To keep pace with the genius of the age, the language requires to be constantly strengthened and brought up to date. Witty American simplicities, as distinct from droll vulgarities, can be as valuable an importation as many of our French borrowings.

The writing in some of our leading newspapers and periodicals reaches an admirable standard, especially when it is free from trite diction, Latinised derivatives and loaded rhetoric, and is wedded to contemporary modes of expression. I doubt whether the conductors of the *Daily Mail* to-day would consider the work of either G. W. Steevens or Edgar Wallace as eminently suited to present-day readers as it was to an earlier generation. Few papers, I am certain, would be inclined to feature Bart Kennedy, whose articles towards the end were largely rhetorical flourishes and extravagances. I remember an article of his on the crypt of St. Paul's, which was mostly made up of melodious combinations of the title, and could only have been printed in the *Daily Mail* out of sheer kindness. Yet, when I first knew Bart Kennedy, he had a simple, graphic and rugged style, which ought to have given him a place in literature.

Among his assignments G. W. Steevens had the Dreyfus re-trial at Rennes to report, than which there could have been few finer opportunities for characteristic and picturesque writing. To-day, coldly dissected, his dispatches are seen to be chiefly remarkable for what modern opinion would term theatrical effects. Thus, for dramatic emphasis, he concentrates on the historic command, "In the name of the French people" (which brings everybody in court to attention), seeking, by artful anti-

thesis, to establish a contrast between the essential nobility of the patriotic phrase and the contemptible character of the verdict that follows. How much better suited to bring out the palpitating drama of those tense moments would be the crisp, modern style of Winston Churchill! The best purple patch of Steevens is, "The President is dull-red above his white moustache," which suffers from being conscious cleverness.

Somebody in that Dreyfus trial compared the gamblers, waiting in the neighbouring cafés for the verdict, to the dice-players of Golgotha. All through the years I have remembered the phrase. That is the test of good writing—to haunt the mind perpetually, like passages from the great poets. If Steevens wrote that sentence, he was a much greater descriptive writer than some of his work would lead us to suspect.

To vary the serious note, there is such a thing as going to extremes. After his long and weary vigil, an ambitious special correspondent, was so overpowered by the sensation of hearing that Queen Victoria was actually dead that he rushed off to the Post Office, and, without stopping to pause or think, penned the following opening sentence, "That great lady, Queen Victoria, is dead. Never since the eternally lamented death of Jesus Christ has so much sorrow been caused in the land, etc., etc."

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### ON SAYING ADIEU TO FLEET STREET

THE last article I wrote for the *Daily Mail*, entitled "Sleep with your head to the North," brought both newspaper and myself endless correspondence and telephone calls. It was hard to believe that so many people, belonging to all sorts and conditions of life, were troubled with sleeplessness. Some of the questions they asked me were more suitable for a medical specialist than a journalist to answer; not a few inquirers wondered if the same beneficent effect could be secured by sleeping with one's legs to the North. The number of worthy citizens who confessed to the benefits of sleeping in line with the earth's magnetic currents was astonishing evidence in favour of the theory. I did my best to satisfy the perplexed. Having introduced health and harmony into their lives, I stood possessed of the inward glow of satisfaction which follows a good deed nobly done. It struck me, being in this pleasant mood, as an appropriate time to retire.

Parting with a firm in which the major part of one's life has been spent cannot be an agreeable business. All manner of emotional memories are aroused. One recollects that here one began as a confident youth, and here one reached dull middle-age. Inevitably there is the tendency to contrast hopes with achievement, to run through the mind the film of the long, connected years, uncomfortably stamped with the imprint of disappointment and falsified expectations, and in my own case with awareness of how considerably failure had outweighed success. A Manchester boy had come up to London, made a precarious living for a number of years, later had moderately prospered, and having reached fifty, an age when other men could look forward to at least ten years more useful and honourable newspaper service, had felt it prudent to retire. In just those blunt phrases a shrewd journalist friend summed up my life, and though it was always my ambition to retire long before I was worn out, who would dare call the reading unfair?

When I shook hands with Sir George Sutton, the Managing

Director, I recalled that in the years I had known him, corresponding with the whole of my association with the firm, there had never been a wry word to mar our always cordial relationship. I thought of the occasions on which we had met as so many landmarks in my troubled career, with two, in particular, urging their claims to be remembered. If one of the two episodes should seem a little frivolous to be connected with this admirable man of affairs, it is, at any rate, human, and any objections should be laid at the door of my nature, which obstinately refuses to take anything or anybody too seriously. Admittedly, in a solemn world like the present, one has to pay dearly for this failing.

First for the serious memory—the momentous meeting at Pau when the price of *The Times* was lowered to meet the challenge of the *Daily Telegraph*, and Sutton, who had come the cross-country journey from the Riviera, was addressed by the fretful Chief as “Sut,” an appropriate abbreviation which, in his mouth, did not sound at all odd. Immediately we were alone Lord Northcliffe, who liked discussing his associates with others, began speaking of Sutton. From his appreciative references, I knew that no other man in his business could ever mean as much to him.

Incidentally the Chief dropped a hint that he proposed to make a new Will in Paris, which intention fate never permitted him to carry out, for that same year he died of his mysteriously contracted illness.

Next for the light memory—a chance early morning encounter with Sutton in the Strand, when, interrupting his swift stride from the Savoy Hotel to Northcliffe House, I cajoled him into a proletarian coffee-house which daily enjoyed my patronage. There, so my artful tongue advised him, he should taste the Mocha of his dreams, at 3d. per cup. Whether the call of the office was strong upon him, or he resented these unaccustomed surroundings, I know not, but this I do know—that barely had the steaming bowls of coffee been placed before us than he was gone, and the tall figure of him might be seen cleaving the street air outside. My respectful protest that, like nectar, the virtue of good coffee was only to be savoured by sipping it slowly, fell on deaf ears. The rest of the conversation to the office, as I recall it, was on such high matters as the state of the country. Now, in retirement, I am burdened with the uneasy suspicion that, every morning Sir George Sutton passes my rendezvous for authentic coffee, he looks quickly around with a shudder, fearful lest the ruffianly Falk be abroad with insidious lures to take him unawares, and once more inveigle him inside.

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As these contrasting images from the past came and went, I felt my eye wander fondly round the room in which I stood, perhaps for the last time, to take a last lingering look at the Sickerts which I knew so well, their detail photographed by constant study on my brain. The pleasure they still gave me I accepted in that sad hour as a symbol of the future. The pull of journalism might wane and cease to be a factor in my life, but the appeal of good pictures, which was of so much more recent origin, would, I knew, never desert me. In their company I could look forward to many pleasant hours.

That afternoon, walking home to Victoria by way of the Embankment, I remembered the youth but newly-arrived in London, who, thirty years previously, had paced that same road, wondering how long the £80, representing the whole of his worldly possessions, would suffice if Fleet Street cast him out. Whether in a material sense the youth, now grown to be fifty, had had his just deserts, was no more capable of being answered than whether he had been given his fair share of contentment. "Call no man happy till the day of his death!"—the ancient wisdom mocked any attempt at a definite verdict. How easily the years ahead might reverse or undo all that had gone before!

I should be flattered to think that the happenings of my fifty years could support a tangible philosophy of life, not riddled through and through with contradictions. But in the mirror of those years I see nothing clearly, nothing except the hand of chance and fortuitous circumstance.

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong ; . . .  
but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Eccles. ix. 11.

Design or pattern is altogether absent from the years I have lived. Where I seek to mould events, I am instead mercilessly shaped. I fall on my feet, only to find unseen forces present to change my prospects completely. The temper that summons a measure of success, in turn brings a greater measure of failure, and disciplined by the systole and diastole of alternating fortune my life passes. The record is before me now—lean years and fat years, those that give and those that take away—but when I attempt to draw a meaning or a purpose from it, I am baffled, as by the larger riddle of life itself. At the best my experience yields no more definite contribution to wisdom than a few narrow reflections :—

*Congenial employment for small money is better than uncomfortable employment for big money.*

*In popular journalism, with its fierce competition, a man turned forty-five, whatever his merits, fights a losing battle, being at the mercy of the legend that only youth synchronises with liveliness, enterprise and up-to-date outlook.*

*There can be young duffers in Fleet Street, as well as old duffers.*

*For a newspaper-man to live for the day, squandering his substance in the belief that good times will last for ever, is to risk a shabby and penurious middle-age, with compensations few and far between.*

*Much that passes current as wisdom in the world is unproven talk, or mere, literary fireworks. Especially is this true of the millions of words written annually on the hackneyed topic of, What Youth Wants. Twenty-five years ago I was a young man, and Youth then, I recall, wanted—To get on in the world, to have a good time and to enjoy a large measure of freedom. There were a few other simple issues of immediate concern over which Youth worried. To-day the only difference is that, in addition to these things, Youth wants—Cheaper and faster motor-cars ! By Youth I mean the great majority of young men ; not the tiny minority whose wants, possibly, are only to be catalogued by skilled literary practitioners of their own age.*

I am afraid we must accept the convention that a journalist must be young who hopes to do well on a popular newspaper. If, being young, he hungers for promotion, let him be sure, in exchange, he does not prematurely sacrifice his youth, for that is to eat of Dead Sea fruit. Since springtime in Fleet Street—how well I know it !—comes but once, let him enjoy to the full that fairest season of his life, for, as all too quickly he travels to journey's end, he may seek in vain pleasanter memories. If the right spirit be in him, he will feel a thrill and a purpose in existence, and take conscious delight of his being. Never shall his youth grow so distant an emotion but that some echo of the old vernal triumphs shall resound in his heart from time to time. As I remember it, part of the enchantment of being young is for the day never to seem too long, and the night never too short, and sleep just a medley of pleasurable dreams.

And all its April to the world thou may'st  
Give back, and half my April back to me.

If late middle-age, by comparison, is not to seem too much of an affliction, youth must prepare suitable consolations to propitiate the coming years. Then, under favourable conditions, we may gauge how true it be that nature subtly adjusts her life values



to the different stages of man's growth, maturity and decline. Only when the young years have lent arms for our defence, can we fight to advantage against encroaching disillusionment, and dulled appetite for the pleasant and simple things of life.

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That over the counter of Fleet Street youth should be a more saleable commodity than experience, cramped, perhaps, by usage, should be no cause of quarrel to those who remember that they were once young themselves, and profited by the same discrimination. That a background of ardent memories may be merely a source of pride to their owner, and of no cash value in modern journalism, should occasion no surprise, since newspapers live in the present and in the future ; not in the past.

Individuals come and go ; the machine remains and is fed. Those who rightly serve it should belong to their period, like the female beret and the tight, skimpy skirt. Even the apprentice who, disdaining the drudgery of climbing the ladder, asks with superb aplomb to begin at the top rung, fits as appropriately into the contemporary Fleet Street scene as the gossip columnist who, asked why he had printed a piece of news told him in confidence, naively remarked that he *never* could keep a secret.

Remembering that after five hard years in the stern Hulton school, I was glad enough to earn three pounds a week, I might feel envious of the fortunate young men, straight from the 'Varsity, who can command five and ten times as much, the rhythm of their lives coarsened by none of the hundred exacting duties that fell to my share.

If I do not envy them, it is because I feel they lack the joy of the struggle, and will not remain young as long as I did. For youth is more than a matter of years ; it is also an attitude of mind. I envy them no more than, later in life, I envied the journalists who loved the reputation of being good conversationalists round the wine table, disbursing with a right royal air the money they should one day want. It may not be the fashionable thing to say, but I have seen the end of too many improvident newspapermen for jealousy of them to be in my soul, and too often sensed Fleet Street to be the stoniest of stepmothers, kinder to the prosperous than to the indigent, to hunger for the applause that the open-handed spender can always command. I might love every stone in the narrow street, but, at fifty, to be at its mercy would make me tremble.

If independence be the journalist's legitimate goal, then no one can accuse me of not having tried, Twice, with papers freshly

started, I struck out my own line, and twice I emerged with my fingers burnt. Once I made a bid for the *Daily Mail* itself, and retired without hurt, but without result. Yet I had the warning of Lord Northcliffe as my apology. "If by thirty-five a journalist is not, at least, a part proprietor of a paying newspaper," he told a colleague of mine, "he should seek some other form of employment."

My years have taught me not to expect too much of this world. More blessed than most men, in that he draws his fill of pleasure from the varied interests and endless excitements of his occupation, a journalist should be the last one to show greed—by wanting more than human existence has reasonably to offer.

Lord Northcliffe came to see there were limits even to what his power, wealth, manifold energies and gifts could extract out of life. When he realised that money had no magic to conjure him up further happiness, he lost all desire to add to his ample store. In the end, I am sure, he was convinced that power had its drawbacks, and, after all, was only comparative, and that as he expanded his newspaper empire, so at the same time he increased his anxieties and responsibilities. How pathetic in the last years of his existence to hear his mournful whisper, "*The Times* worries me!"

With ruinous speed a journalist parts with his illusions. He may be wiser for his experience, but certainly not happier. Too many peeps behind the scenes, too many glimpses of the hidden machinery, work havoc in his spirit. Declining to have his picture published in a gallery of newspaper portraits, my old Chief explained, "I object to publicity. I am like the small boy at the Sunday-school treat, who, asked if he would like some jam, replied, 'No, ma'am, I works where it is made.'"

Stripped of his illusions a newspaperman grows to envy the people who are not so worldly wise, and, because of the ignorance with which they continue to be blessed, view life through rose-coloured spectacles. My greatest grievance against Fleet Street is that it robbed me too early of comfortable error, left me too soon a prey to the cynicism which fattens as it corrodes. But, for the price of one's pleasant beliefs, it is, I suppose, some solace to have gained in mental stature, in judgment and in a sense of correct values.

When illusions are dead, there yet remains the vision of the dreamer. In the sanctuary of his soul, like old Goethe, the journalist who has completed his innings can still hope to preserve, unsullied, those youthful ideals of which life has denied

him fruition. Mellowed by their tender influence, he will come to regard his experience with a larger charity, and take delight in renewing, in imagination, those parts of his life which are linked up with fondest memories. And, in such a mood, it should not seem either a vain or a small thing to have been born, to have striven and to have suffered.

Over and over again I tell myself that, when Fleet Street has ceased to hold thrall over me, there will remain the satisfying enjoyments which cost so little—to write at leisure and to one's own taste; to read good books and look at great pictures; to breathe pure air and listen to the song of the birds; to watch nature slough her skin as season advances and recedes; to feel on a summer's morning the thrill of a marching Guards' band, and, as a more provocative sign of human interest, to have the idle but respectful eye wooed at a safe distance by the curve of a shapely leg, as was said of Manet, who filled his note-books with sketches made in that fashion. Whenever I am too old and too bored for such interests, then, indeed, it will be true to say journalism has taken me and stripped me bare.

If there are moments when doubt breaks through my defences, and my whole being is distilled in apprehension and nameless fears, it is because the process of adjustment, from the life of Fleet Street to this other life, is slow and not easily accomplished. Looking to the future, and thinking of what is in store for me, I am reminded of one more anecdote of my old Chief, which may suitably bring this book to a close.

During the War the wife of one of the workpeople knocked at the door of Lord Northcliffe's room, and held out four £1 notes for his inspection. "Is there anything the matter with them?" he queried. "No, my lord," she replied, "the notes are all right, but they told me that while the War lasted I should have my husband's wages. Isn't there some mistake?"

The cashier produced the wages book. "Your husband's wages have been £4 for years," he told the woman.

"£4 for years!" was the vicious reply. "Exactly what I always suspected. *You just wait until Bill comes home!*"

Fate is often an angry wife, waiting round the corner in evil humour. Yet, looking ahead, I should like to think that I deserved her compassionate treatment. If it be asked why such a one as myself should be entitled to special consideration, I implore my friends to have ready an answer. Say, "He worked thirty years in Fleet Street." Surely that is enough!

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